

BREAKING IN

Debut authors: How they did it, what they learned, and why you can do it, too.

BY CHUCK SAMBUCHINO

Tara Lazar



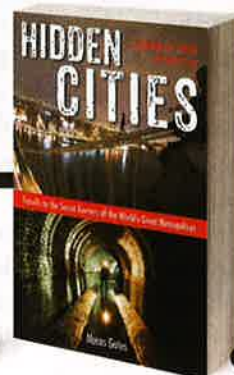
1 *The Monstore*
(picture book, Aladdin,
June) "Zack wants to
return the monsters
he bought because

they don't spook his pesky little sister—but there are no returns or exchanges at *The Monstore*."

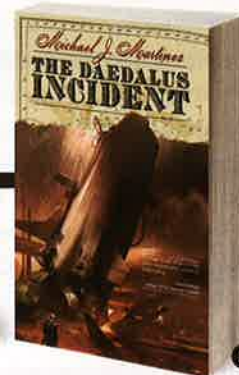
WRITES FROM: New Jersey. **BEFORE MONSTORE:** I always knew I wanted to write for children, but I broke into publishing by writing flash fiction for adults. I'm very comfortable with the short form. That experience translated well when I switched over to picture books. **TIME FRAME:** The title *The Monstore* was something I had in my head for months, but I had no premise. After a [writing] conference, I was encouraged to create a story line and show it to an agent. ... It still took me months to sit down and write it—but once I did, it spilled out in an afternoon. Of course, it then went through umpteenth revisions. **ENTER THE AGENT:** I met my agent through a series of social media connections. Ammi-Joan Paquette of the Erin Murphy Literary Agency saw [my friend's] tweet about my book and asked what she was reading. I then got a referral. **BIGGEST THRILL:** When I was asked my opinion about the illustrator choice, James Burks. Not all authors get that opportunity. ... He interpreted the characters and the scenes better



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than I ever could have imagined. **WHAT I DID RIGHT:** I kept writing new stories. *The Monstore* was probably the 20th picture book I wrote. **IF I COULD DO IT AGAIN:** I would have started years earlier! I finally realized I had to make the time. **PLATFORM:** I began my blog in 2007 and launched Picture Book Idea Month (PiBoIdMo) in 2009, which has gained a tremendous following. **WEBSITE:** taralazar.com. **NEXT UP:** A second book called *I Thought This Was a Bear Book*, about an alien who crash-lands into the story of [Goldilocks and] the three bears.

Moses Gates



2 *Hidden Cities*
(travel memoir, Tarcher,
March) "A book of
worldwide urban explo-
ration and adventure."

WRITES FROM: New York City. **BEFORE CITIES:** I spent 2006 and 2007 doing a lot of crazy stuff. At the end of 2007, I climbed up the Notre Dame [cathedral in Paris] and got arrested. And I remember thinking, *You know, I could totally write a book about all this.* **ENTER THE AGENT:** My agent is the talented and tenacious Alyssa Reuben

of the Paradigm Agency. Yes—cold pitching to the slush pile does actually work on occasion. **TIME FRAME:** By the time I got the deal, I had a bunch of essays written. I thought I'd put them together and knock it out in three months. It took me almost a year to write my first draft. ... Somehow, the few new stories became the whole book. **WHAT I LEARNED:** Deals [can be] sealed on a handshake. After I got the deal, my agent told me I wouldn't get the contract for a few months. It took some convincing before I accepted that this meant I was 100 percent getting published. **WHAT I DID RIGHT:** Just wrote well. What I really learned was that even though everyone's always talking about platform and marketing, good writing and voice still matter. The people who become agents and editors are people who believe in good writing and storytelling. **IF I COULD DO IT AGAIN:** [I'd] ask for more time to review copy edits, which is where your voice and rhythm can really get screwed up. **WEBSITE:** mosescities.com. **NEXT UP:** I worked as a double-decker tour bus guide for a while. There's something in there—maybe another memoir, maybe a novel.

Michael J. Martinez



③ **The Daedalus Incident** (fantasy, Night Shade Books, May) "In 2132, astronauts at a Martian mining colony

face an incursion from another dimension—one in which 18th-century sailing ships ply the void between worlds."

WRITES FROM: New Jersey. **BEFORE DAEDALUS:** I've been in journalism for two decades, including stints at ABCNews.com and The Associated Press. Yet the idea for this book was always floating in the back of my mind, despite having zero experience writing fiction. **TIME FRAME:** Back in 2003, I saw a poster for Disney's *Treasure Planet*. I was taken with the visual of a sailing ship in space and quickly

rented the film. It wasn't good, so I figured I could do better, and soon I had 40,000 words of setting notes. The first draft was done in about three months.

ENTER THE AGENT: Sara Megibow of the Nelson Literary Agency [responded to my query with a request] for a partial—and then rejected it. However, she left the door open for me to work on it and resubmit, [which I successfully did]. **WHAT I LEARNED:** Publishing is a very subjective business. I was surprised by comments from publishers who passed on the book before Night Shade Books acquired it. No two comments were the same, and some were diametrically opposed. **WHAT I DID RIGHT:** My reporting experience compelled me to do my research in terms of getting an agent. I did my due diligence on each agent, making sure

they represented my genre and had a good track record of placing authors with great publishers. And I followed their submission guidelines *exactly*. **IF I COULD DO IT AGAIN:** More revisions! Looking back, my book was nowhere near ready for submission. The book that Sara and I finally submitted to publishers was the eighth full revision. **WEBSITES:** michaeljmartinez.net, night-bazaar.com. **NEXT UP:** The sequel to *The Daedalus Incident*. **WD**

Chuck Sambuchino is the editor of *Guide to Literary Agents* and the author of *Create Your Writer Platform* (both from WD Books).



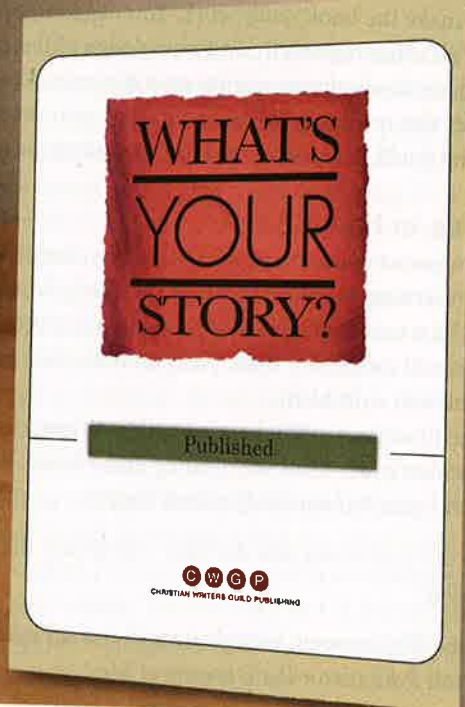
SLUSH PILE SUCCESS

Read Martinez's winning query letter: writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/guide-to-literary-agents.

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