

THE GREAT AGENT HUNT: By Christie Craig & Faye Hughes

1) Snagging an Agent's Interest:

- a: Direct Query
- b: Contest
- c: Conferences/agent appointments
- d: Word of mouth

The best way to snag an agent's interest? Write a damn good book. Never stop learning craft.

2) Knowing if the Agent is Worth Snagging:

- a: Interview the agent
- b: Ask other writers about the agent
- c: Check to see if the agent has complaints against them. Contact Carol Ritter, Professional Relations Manager, (832) 717-5200 or [critter@rwanational.org](mailto:critter@rwanational.org)
- d. Visit the Preditors and Editors website: <http://anotherrealm.com/prededitors/>

The best way to know if an agent is right for you? Do your homework and spend a lot of time asking the agent the *right* questions.

3) Working With an Agent

- a: Trust your agent, but never stop trusting yourself
- b: Expect your agent to market you, but never stop marketing yourself
- c: Communicate with your agent
- d: Be realistic in your expectations
- e: Remember they work for you
- f: Remember it's business

The best way to assure a good agent/author working relationship is to choose the best agent for you.

4) Surviving a Bad Agent

- a: End the relationship
- b: End the relationship in the best way
- c: Be wiser in choosing your next agent

The best way to survive a bad agent is to move on. Write your next book, and learn from your mistakes.

5) Keeping Going when the Going gets Tough

- a: Know you aren't the only writer having a difficult time finding an agent
- b: Focus on the positive
- c: Let the rejection motivate you

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d: Rely on your support system – writing groups/friends

The best way to keep going when the going gets tough is to put on a thick skin, keep improving, and never stop believing in yourself. Writing is a tough business, you have to be tougher. To watch the video and for writing tips, visit Christie and Faye at [www.WritewithUs.net](http://www.WritewithUs.net).

## QUESTIONS TO ASK PROSPECTIVE AGENTS

Not sure what to ask a prospective agent? These authors have suggestions for you!

### Pat Pritchard (Alexis Morgan)

Alexis Morgan is the author of fourteen published books and novellas, including the highly acclaimed Paladins of Darkness series for Pocket Books. The first book, DARK PROTECTOR, was an RT Top Pick. She is published in short contemporary romance and has ten American West historicals to her to her claim. [www.alexismorgan.com](http://www.alexismorgan.com)

*For me, it was important that I find an agent whom I felt comfortable talking to. Beyond that:*

- 1. What is the agent's attitude about editorial input on the projects she handles? My agent only offers her opinion if I ask for it, but when I was looking I heard several agents speak who edited heavily--which I did not want.*
- 2. How often does the agent communicate status on projects? Does she send copies of rejections or just that the editor has decided to pass?*
- 3. What fees does she charge--postage? photocopying? or none at all?*
- 4. If she is the only agent in her office, who would take over in case of emergency?*
- 5. Does she offer a contract or does she take on a client on a project by project basis?*

### Colleen Thompson

Colleen Thompson, a former RITA finalist, writes romantic thrillers for Dorchester Publishing, including her latest, Heat Lightning (Love Spell Romantic Suspense, Nov. 2007). FMI and writer's tips, visit [www.colleen-thompson.com](http://www.colleen-thompson.com).

- 1. Does he/she have sub-agents to sell subsidiary rights? (Audio rights, translation, movie, magazine excerpts) Agents that simply leave this to the publisher cost their authors lots of potential money.*
- 2. It's a great idea to ask for the agency clause that's inserted into contracts before you're in a negotiation with a publisher. (This can be an unpleasant surprise.)*
- 3. Also important: any fees, percentages on foreign sales, time frame for response to questions, and whether the agent prefers e-mail or phone communication.*

JoAnn Ross

New York Times bestselling author JoAnn Ross has written more than 100 books for a bunch of different publishers. She recently signed with her 5th (and hopefully forever after!) agency and has, over a 25-year career, made many of the mistakes she cautions against.

*1. What is his/her commission rate on domestic sales? Foreign sales? (The industry average is around 20% to cover the commission to the foreign agent.) Are there other charges? (I would NOT advise signing with any agent who tacks a monthly office fee onto her bill. That's what her commission is for.) Who pays for phone calls? Who pays the mail or messenger fee to send the ms to editors? (This is always the agent. Or should be.) If the ms needs to be copied, who pays for that? Needless to say, you NEVER pay an agent a reading fee; that's part of their job and if you're not already a client, that's how they find new ones who can make them money. An agent who earns even part of his/her living from reading fees will be a lot less hungry when it comes to making deals. They should be motivated to make you lots of money so they get their cut. Is your fee negotiable?*

*2. Does your agency have a contract? If it does, read it very carefully to make certain you don't get tied up. I know writers who've signed time-length contracts and literally could not send anything out for two years after they'd broken with an agent who wasn't doing anything for them. Additionally, how long the agent keeps rights to a ms needs to be put in writing, in the event you break with the agency before a book sells, then subsequently sells after you've left. How do you end the contract? Registered letter? Phone call? Turning around three times and saying, "I divorce you, agent? (This is my personal favorite; unfortunately, it doesn't always work. <g>) An agent/author relationship will be the most important you have after family; it often works on a level a lot like a marriage and whether it's amiable or not, it'll feel like a divorce, so choose carefully. As so many people have said, a bad agent is worse than no agent.*

*3. How long will it take you to read my work? Return phone calls? Send out royalty statements? Do you send out the original statements from the publishers? Or copies? Will you split fees? (This is where you and the agent receive separate checks from the publisher. It's especially helpful in relationships with former agents.)*

*4. Will we discuss ahead of time who you're sending my mss to or will you insist on making that decision yourself? (Not a good idea, especially if you've met an editor at a conference who you think might like your story but your agent doesn't have a working relationship with the editor and would prefer working with ones he/she already knows.) Will you keep me up to date on what's going on with the ms? By phone? E-mail? Will you pass on rejection letters or just paraphrase them to me? Will you tell me about every offer?*

*5. Do you consider helping formulate a career plan as part of your job description, or do you merely negotiate contracts? Will you watch for new opportunities, keep me informed of them, and keep working on my behalf with editors and publishers even when you're not submitting new work to them?*

*6. Do you make multiple submissions? (Imo, this should be a resounding yes! That's one huge*

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*benefit of having an agent in the first place.)*

*7. Do you have office staff, or do you answer the phones, send out statements, negotiate contracts, tend to correspondence, etc, by yourself?*

*8. Do you have in-house lawyers? Do you use outside counsel? Who pays for them to examine a contract? Under what conditions would the writer pay legal fees?*

*9. How many clients does your agency have? (Which will lead into the next batch of questions regarding your position in the agency pack.)*

*10. What authors do you represent? How many authors do you represent in my genre?*

*11. What recent sales have you made?*

*12. How many books have you sold in various genres in the past year?*

*13. Where have you sold?*

*14. Is there a house you will not do business with? And why?*

*15. Do you require a proposal or a completed ms?*

*16. Do you prefer I send you one proposal at a time, or more than one, to let you decide if any interest you? (I know writers who are very happy working this way. Personally, I discovered early on while writing for newspapers and magazines that if I gave an editor two choices, all too often he'd select the one he liked best, while if I'd proposed them individually, there's a chance both would sell. This is a decision to be made by you and your agent depending on how you'd like to work together.)*

*17. Do you believe in providing editorial input? Acting as first read? Do you see your role more as career guidance rather than editorial assistant? (Or both?) Or are you most focused on making the deal and getting the best possible contract?*

*18. What is the protocol when you don't want to represent a particular ms, but would prefer another project instead? Who determines which proposals are submitted to publishers? (I had huge problems with this one once, as have many other writers I know.)*

*19 Do you "see" me writing a certain number of books a year? What if I want to write more? Less?*

*20. Do you prefer your writers stay in one genre? Does the agency have the contacts if I wish to "branch out?" to other dissimilar genres?*

*21. Do you read all mss before submitting them?*

*22. Where do you see my career at this point, and how will you/your agency help move it to the next level? (This is VERY important. Agents can get complacent when checks are coming in well; if energy isn't spent building a career, it can start sliding downhill. Inertia is never a good*

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*thing.)*

*23. How many publishers - on average - will you send a book to before you give up?*

*24. What houses do you deal with most often (in my genre)? What editors do you submit to the most? Are you open to my suggestions? This is important because you'll want to be a partnership. Remember, you are employing the agent, it is NOT the other way around.*

*25. What provisions do you (or the agency) have in place to continue to deal with outstanding contracts, process money due me, send out 1099s (that's a writer's tax form) and other business needs in the event of death or disablement?*

*26. How many agents are there in the agency? Will they all have input regarding my mss? (Some agencies work this way, which can give you more feedback, but can also delay the submission time while I know authors who enjoy this, it's always seems to me that too much early input can stifle creativity.)*

*27. Will I be dealing with you or an assistant?*

*28. What do you expect from me as a client?*

*29. Why do you think I'd be a good client for your agency?*

*30. Why do you think you'd be a good agent for me?*

*31. This should have been number one: How long have you been an agent? What was your background before becoming an agent?*

Anonymous

*What happens if you leave the agency to open your own? Am I contracted by you, or the agency? What happens if you just get out of the agency business?*

*Do you change your socks everyday? <<SMILE>>*

Good luck with your agency hunt!

Christie Craig and Faye Hughes

For more info on Christie Craig – [www.Christie-Craig.com](http://www.Christie-Craig.com); for more info on Faye Hughes – [www.FayeHughes.net](http://www.FayeHughes.net). For more info on their writing workshops and collaborative non-fiction – [www.WritewithUs.net](http://www.WritewithUs.net)