

Conventions, Dinners, Hanging Out

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

Here we have yet another series of opportunities to either have a great time or wake up the next morning wishing you were dead. We'll deal with conventions, writers' conferences, and so on first. You go to them hoping to meet editors, and maybe you'll be lucky and get the chance. If you do find yourself talking to an editor who publishes books in your field, DO NOT whip out your manuscript and offer to let her read it. Do not lurk outside the restroom stall and shove it under the door at her, either. (One editor told the story about this happening to her. I shuddered.) Do not corner her and start telling her the plot of the book. Do not, in fact, say anything more about your book than, at the end of your conversation—which will NOT be exclusively about how you are a writer, please—"I've finished a novel that I'd really like to submit to you. May I?"

If she isn't backlogged for the next two years (and some editors are, so take her word for it if she says she can't accept anything right at the moment), and if you were pleasant and interesting to talk to, she'll probably say yes. When you get home, write a little letter to cover your manuscript reminding her where she met you and under what circumstances—"I loved your story about the publisher and the conch soup!" for example—and ship out the manuscript, following all the rules for correct submission.

The exception to this, of course, is if you have already sold something to the editor, and have set aside a meeting time strictly to discuss your work. Then, of course, you talk shop.

Otherwise, you'll still be talking shop (because when writers and editors get together, we always fall back on talking about writing sooner or later), but it will be generic shop talk. Pay attention to subjects—I fell into doing a story for an L. Sprague de Camp anthology because in general conversation with my editor at breakfast I enthused about The Compleat Enchanter, noting that it was the first fantasy that I read that made me want to write fantasy. Turns out she was putting together some Compleat Enchanter stories by other writers, edited by de Camp, and asked me if I thought I'd like to do one. Talk about moments of magic.

Which segues us neatly into dinners, lunches, brunches, and breakfasts. Just a few rules here.

- **Listen more than you talk.**
- **Don't be a bore or a boor.**
- **Don't get drunk.**
- **Don't order the most expensive thing** on the menu just because she's paying.
- **Don't make a pass at her** no matter how cute she is and how studly you are (or any variation on the gender thing).
- **Listen more than you talk.** (Yeah, I know I already said that, but I wanted to be sure you remembered it. It's the most important rule.)

Finally, hanging out. A few more rules.

- **Don't hog access to the editor;** you won't be the only writer at the party (or fair, or whatever) and others will want to hang out with her, too.
- **Don't get drunk.** This one comes up a lot, really. Where

there are editors, there tends to be free booze in almost unlimited amounts. You would be wise to go very, very light on it; I have seen otherwise cool writers do incredibly stupid things when they got drunk. And anything you do not only can be held against you, but tends to show up on film, and in conversation between other editors and writers forever after.

- **Don't talk business.** Business time is for business. It's why you get to deduct your phone calls to New York. Hanging out is for fun, and editors like to have fun, too. And you still get to deduct hanging out, because you are Networking and developing Meaningful Relationships with Colleagues. I got to deduct the balloon fight at the SFWA party, as well as the rest of that glorious trip. Granted I sold three books that weekend, but even if I hadn't, I met some wonderful people, and still work with many of them.

That's my take on how it's done. Now go, write, submit. Brace yourself; your editor awaits.

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