



Take Note

A Web-hosting service for writers

Every writer needs an online portfolio where editors or agents can view her work. What's a writer with a day job, busy family life, and nonexistent tech skills supposed to do?

Writer's Residence, a browser-based Web-hosting service, is designed specifically for writers, where they can use their own domain name and maintain creative control over key elements of their website: the home page, clips/excerpts, resumé and bio.

Freelance writer Monica Shaw real-

ized early in her career that she needed an online presence to promote her work. "Lots of writers want a website, but [few] have the budget, technical skills or patience to put one together," she says. So she teamed up with programmer Tim Harding to create an affordable solution for writers; Writer's Residence costs \$8.99 a month.

Freelancers, copywriters, novelists and nonfiction authors alike can personalize one of eight templates. The site accepts unlimited, multi-page samples, chapters, reviews, etc. An image (e.g., a magazine or book cover) and audio-video clip can accompany each sample.

Shaw and Harding poll users about



features that are important to them, and so recently they added a blog feature. Shopping-cart functions are not available at this time, but authors can link to an online bookstore. The service also includes timely tech support.

"Using Writer's Residence is effortless and intuitive," says Maureen Corrigan, a corporate writer from Massachusetts. "I finished my site in a few hours. I love that ... as long as I can access the Internet, I can update my portfolio in real time, any time, any place."

If you want to promote your craft without losing your shirt, get more information at www.writersresidence.com.

—Karen M. Rider

DUELING WITH WORDS

Stay true to your own voice, especially if it's different

FIND YOUR VOICE. Those three little words rank right up there with "Read, read, read" and "Don't give up" as the advice most often given to newbie writers.

Finding your voice isn't the hard part; it's staying true to your voice once you've found it, believing that it's good enough to be published.

We authors are big on self-doubt. That self-doubt starts in the author cradle, when we're first starting out.

Chances are if you're a writer, you've always known deep down that you wanted to be one. But when you read a certain book or series by a particular author, you knew you had to be one.

That's how it happened to me.

I read Mary Stewart's Merlin novels and I knew I wanted to do that. I wanted to write just like her.

Guess what? There was no way in a hot place that I was going to write like Mary Stewart. Why? Because I'm not Mary Stewart.

But when I first got the writing bug, she was my ideal of how a great author should write. Absolutely gorgeous prose. And if I couldn't write like her, then I'd never be a great author, or even a good one.

I tried to write like her, and then like several other authors whose work I fell in love with over the years. I wound up with three manuscripts' worth of trying. Those books are in my office closet now, never to see the light of day.

Why? They weren't *me*; it wasn't my voice. As a result, the words just lay there on the page. I was trying to be someone I wasn't.

I write quasi-traditional fantasy. I say "quasi" because my characters use modern speech. Yes, they wear doublets and fight with blades (and bombs and buckets and whiskey bottles), but for the most part, they talk like us.

I've heard my books called *The Lord of the Rings* meets *The Sopranos*. Definitely not like Mary Stewart, or any of the other authors whose work I admire.

My books are like me. I don't do fancy speeches and lush descriptions. I can't do them—and now I don't even want to. I write like my heroine Raine Benares talks—she's a straight shooter, plainspoken and snarky, with a dry and twisted sense of humor.

That's my voice. And that voice was what sold my series, first to my agent, and then to my publisher. They offered representation and bought my books because they were different.

So, if your voice is different from anything out there, don't try to change it. You're unique, and so is your voice. Embrace it. Run with it.

Being different can mean being published.

—Lisa Shearin, the author of *Bewitched & Betrayed* and other fantasy-adventure novels, lives in North Carolina and blogs about fiction writing at www.lisashearin.com.



Jimmy Allen Photography

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