

To Edit Or Not To Edit: J'son M. Lee Sets The Record Straight By: Michelle Cuttino

There seems to be an influx of self-published novels that lack the finished polish of books released by the majors. Gone are the days where you purchased a book for ten to fifteen dollars, and didn't have to worry about grammatical errors, poor character development, weak plots or storylines and overall shoddy work.

Self-published authors have total control over their releases and due to low, if not invisible, budgets, editing and proofreading seems to be where they choose to make their cuts to keep overhead at a minimal. However, this cut may prove to be more costly in the end, as readers are fickle and they will not continue to purchase substandard work with their hard-earned money.

So, the great debate is to edit or not to edit. Black Literature Magazine sits down with J'son M. Lee, President and Owner of Sweet Georgia Press, to get his input on why editing is one of the most important ingredients of publishing.

Michelle: In addition to being a playwright, producer, actor, publisher and author, you are also an editor and have just recently launched your own company, Sweet Georgia Press. For those who don't know, what is an editor and what are their duties?

J'son: An editor is nothing short of a mediator. The editor stands between the author and the reader and helps them understand each other. An editor must have an excellent command of English. That is not to say that an editor is perfect. We are far from it. We supplement our skills with standard resources (style guides, thesauruses and the like). An editor must be honest and a good communicator. Writers need to hear the truth about their work in order to make it the best it can be. Finally, the editor must remain humble. As crucial as the editor is to the writing process, it is equally as crucial to remove all egos. The ultimate goal is to spotlight the author and their writing.

Michelle: You have been in the industry for many years. What made you finally part ways with Foresight Publishing, LLC and bring your role as editor to the forefront?

J'son: Leaving Foresight was a difficult decision. I was blessed to partner with some very talented individuals and I learned a lot in the process. Ultimately, I realized my business partners and I were moving in two different directions. You only get one life. I've always felt the more you concentrate on a job that takes you away from the core of who you are, the further you are away from your own dreams. I wasn't so much interested in publishing other people as I was in developing those who have a passion for writing. That's more in line with my gifts. Sometimes people just need someone who can weave their story into a great work. That's where I come in.

Michelle: How important is editing when it comes to publishing?

J'son: I can't stress enough that editing is an integral part of the publishing process. An author simply cannot bypass this step. It is very frustrating for me to read an unedited work. As a reader and reviewer, I feel like the author has sold or gifted me a bill of goods. If I pay for something, I want my money's worth. Quite frankly, if you sell me an unedited book you've shortchanged me on a very basic expectation. And if you gift me something, don't belittle the value by not editing it. As an editor, I fashion it to someone running their nails across a chalkboard. It's something the majority of us find extremely irritating. Go the extra step – GET YOUR BOOK PROFESSIONALLY EDITED!

Michelle: What advice would you give to the self-publisher who feels they can do self-edits and bypass the whole editing process?

J'son: I think it's sheer arrogance to think you can self-edit your own book. I'm an editor and I pay another editor to edit for me. I think authors are too close to the project to be objective. My advice would be to stop fooling yourself – GET YOUR BOOK PROFESSIONALLY EDITED!

Michelle: How does one acquire an editor? Are there specific guidelines they should follow? Explain.

J'son: I think the best way to acquire an editor is word of mouth from authors who have firsthand experience with the editor. After you have a referral, read some of the books that this editor has edited. Read the reviews for these books. If you see consistent editing comments, you need to keep looking. Also, don't be afraid to ask for a sample edit.

One of my goals as an editor is to minimize (if not eliminate) any editing issues for the reader. No book is going to be perfect from an editing standpoint, but a good editor wants to make it as error free as humanly possible.

Michelle: If you don't mind, could you give us a sort of industry standard on pricing?

J'son: In doing my own research on editing prices, I found that prices were all over the board. What I tried to do was standardize the pricing while remaining competitive. In fact, my prices and scope of work are listed on my website. Again, this goes back to my comment about editors needing to be honest. I don't want to overcharge an author and I want the author to know exactly what they're paying for.

Michelle: In your experience, what has been the biggest misconception as far as editing is concerned?

J'son: I think that there are two big misconceptions. I think authors feel an editor will make their work perfect. There is no perfect editing. Again, my goal is to make your work as error free as humanly possible. The other big misconception is that editing is easy. It is far from easy. It is time consuming, requires research on the part of the editor and it is a tedious process.

Michelle: For those who don't know the difference, please explain to us what proofreading, copy editing and developmental editing each entail?

J'son: There are several different types of editors. I typically will ask an author for the first three chapters of their manuscript to get a feel for their writing style. I can usually determine the level of service they need based on this submission. Below are the services I offer:

Proofreading: This is a final read of the edited work before it goes to print (usually the typeset manuscript). After every other level of editing has taken place sometimes, because of changes that have been made, that final look is imperative. I strongly suggest that this phase of the editing not be skipped.

Copyediting: This is a word for word check for spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structuring, chapter numbering, and consistency of facts.

Developmental Editing: This process checks for plot structure, believability, and story flow. Does your story have a clear beginning, middle, and ending? Do your characters have a clearly defined dilemma? Does your protagonist have growth by the end of the story? Is your story's timeline believable? Do you have characters with depth? Is the advice in your nonfiction complete and thorough? We will help you find ways to make it more relevant and current for today's market.

Comprehensive Editing: This includes both developmental and copyediting. This is a COMPLETE editing service designed especially for the novice writer or first-time author.

Michelle: What makes Sweet Georgia Press stand out from the others who are offering the same or similar editing services?

J'son: My ultimate goal as an editor is to ensure the author's authentic voice. In tandem, I want to foster a professional partnership. Your time with me should be favorable. I am forthcoming and communicate at all stages of the process. I am thorough and will deliver the best product possible. Lastly, I am professional and will maintain an image

that reflects favorably upon the author and I. There are many great editors to choose from, but I am one of the most conscientious ones in the industry. Let's Write!

Michelle: Please let us know your social media and/or contact information for those who are seeking an editor, or have further questions about the myriad services you provide.

J'son: For more information, please visit our website at www.sweetgeorgiapress.com. We are also on Twitter (@sweetgapress) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/SweetGeorgiaPress). Our mailing address is:

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Sweet Georgia Press is a small publishing and editing firm based in Baltimore, MD. Established in 2012, we hit the ground running with our direct approach to finding success. With an eye for detail and a commitment to professionalism, we offer our clients the full package.