

Writers have to deal with rejection. This is a piece I wrote on the irony of the situation. Fittingly, I got a “Keep your head up, this was almost published” letter from the New York Times.

The Form of Rejection

Down at the very bottom of my bottom desk drawer is an unmarked folder that reads like this:

Dear Author,/

/Please forgive this impersonal note. We hope you can understand that we receive a tremendous number of query letters and are forced to focus our attention on a limited number of projects. We regret that we must decline the offer to review your work./

//

/Dear Author,/

/Please forgive this form letter, but due to the volume of projects we receive we are unable to respond to each one individually, though we do read them all...Unfortunately, I didn't feel that necessary personal connection with your work that I need to be able to represent it wholeheartedly./

//

/Dear Author,/

/Many thanks for the arrival of your letter describing your project/s. I must, unfortunately, report that I do not feel sufficiently enthusiastic about your project to pursue it further. I regret the seemingly impersonal nature of this letter./

One after the other, wave after wave, they go on, coming up with new reasons why this would-be fiction writer doesn't quite make the cut. In some cases, it's someone else's fault:

/Due to the current status of the publishing industry—and the selectivity that the market now demands—we regret that we cannot consider your material at this time./

//

/Because we receive more than 300 queries per week, we must be extremely selective on

a very subjective basis./

//

And there's an especially heartbreaking one that enthusiastically asked for a larger sample, only a week later to have it all shoved in a stuffed manila envelope, one that was carefully stamped by a Stone Ridge postal employee as five people stood in line and waited:

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/While I enjoyed reading your work I just did not fall in love with it in the way I need to take it on./

It's funny, because it's all about love. Loving to write, hating to fail, taking time out of life to sit down and crank out a manuscript, doing it in the last weeks of someone else's company doomed to failure, then sitting at home every day, fighting against procrastination and boredom and hopelessness. Not telling another person about this work, only agents. Time and time again the heavy self-addressed stamped envelope arrives to announce similar findings:

/Unfortunately, the project described does not suit our list at this time./

//

/As for your material, I'm afraid I must pass./

//

/While I think it sounds interesting, I just don't think it's for me./

//

/I just don't think I can sell it for you, so I'll have to pass./

I promised I would send out my queries and pleas until 100 responses came back negative. I kept track of the ones going out, in an Excel format, typing in each result with a general comment. I would use order to defeat the negativity, but no one can win such a battle. At least no one living. There are the stories of authors persevering through tremendous failure, finally turning tragedy into triumph. James Joyce. Samuel Becket. Margaret Mitchell. All absorbed countless rejections before finding acceptance. I could not wait forever. The manuscript/s would. Nonfiction work came in and I was lucky to get involved once again in my field of expertise.

But I had it all coming. A cosmic comeuppance from those final days with the failing publishing company with only a skeleton staff of so-called executives, waiting for Random House to decide should they or shouldn't buy our little house. They didn't. I never got to see what rejection language Random House used, but I'm sure I would have been familiar with whatever prose they selected.

You see, in those final months, and weeks, and days, in the cavernous bunker of the old IBM building in Kingston, typing away in a nondescript office among the hundreds of vacant same such rooms down endless darkened corridors, the manuscripts from would-be sports authors were dropped on my desk. Our distressed company couldn't possibly publish them, yet someone had to reply. Me.

No examples of my own letters to the hopeful writers survive, but I recall that I tried to write each one individually, with feeling and sensitivity. In the end, though, they were just another set of rejections that crushed someone else's spirit. Quickly enough, that all turned around and I was stuck in the ironic punishment level of hell. Waiting.

I'm sorry, but I just don't think that it is right for me at this time.

Matthew Silverman is co-editor of The ESPN Pro Football Encyclopedia, and managing editor for the last edition of The Baseball Encyclopedia. He is author of Mets Essential and several other books about baseball.