



# Starve Better: Surviving the Endless Horror of the Writing Life

*Nick Mamatas*

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## **Starve Better: Surviving the Endless Horror of the Writing Life** Nick Mamatas

Starve Better makes no promises of making you a bestselling author. It won't feed aspiring writers' dreams of fame and fortune. This book is about survival: how to generate ideas when you needed them yesterday, dialogue and plot on the quick, and what your manuscript is up against in the slush piles of the world. For non-fiction writers, Starve Better offers writing techniques such as how to get (relatively) high-paying assignments in second and third-tier magazines, how to react to your first commissioned assignment, and how to find gigs that pay NOW as the final notices pile up and the mice eat the last of the pasta in the cupboard. Humor, essays and some of the most widely read blog pieces from Nick Mamatas, author and editor of fiction that has caught the attention of speculative fiction's most prestigious awards, come together for the first time in a writers' guide that won't teach anyone how to get rich and famous... but will impart the most valuable skill in the business: how to starve better.

### Blurb:

"Mamatas offers up a no-nonsense guide that should be required reading for all writers. Prepare to have some illusions shattered... because you need them shattered. A great resource from a guy with the experience to back up the advice."

-Jeff VanderMeer, author of *City of Saints and Madmen* and *Finch*

### About the Author:

Nick Mamatas is the author of three and a half novels, over seventy short stories, and hundreds of feature articles, and is also an editor and anthologist. His fiction has been nominated for the Bram Stoker and International Horror Guild awards and translated into German, Italian, and Greek; his editorial work with *Clarkesworld* earned the magazine World Fantasy and Hugo award nominations. Nick's reportage, short stories, and essays have appeared in venues such as *Razor*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Silicon Alley Reporter*, the *Village Voice*, *The Smart Set*, *The Writer*, *Poets & Writers* and anthologies including *Supernatural Noir* and *Lovecraft Unbound*. He teaches at Western Connecticut State University in the MFA program in Creative and Professional Writing, was a visiting writer at Lake Forest College and the University of California, Riverside's Palm Desert Campus, and runs writing classes in the San Francisco Bay Area.

## **Starve Better: Surviving the Endless Horror of the Writing Life Details**

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# **From Reader Review Starve Better: Surviving the Endless Horror of the Writing Life for online ebook**

**Thomas Pluck says**

Excellent advice throughout. Cuts through the BS.

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**Paul Fergus says**

This book is common sense gold nuggets, plucked from the sewers of the writing industry by a wily and resourceful prospector who knows how to make a mean pot of beans. You couldn't ask for a better collection of insight and technique; people waste years of their lives to ferret out even one nugget of wisdom. Most writers haunt the sewers like hungry ghosts, their dreams dying in the gutter.

The author has tackled just about every stream in the tunnels that might pan out, and he shares his results so you can get an idea of what goes on in accessway 45-B of the MFA program track. The value of the sections will vary depending on which speaks most to your immediate situation. For me, the last paragraph of the "All Advice is Terrible Advice" essay pays for the book. The "This is How You Freelance" essay should be required reading in schools. This is stuff worth going back to and finding a way to implement in your life, even if you aren't a writer.

Mind you, these are the sewers and that means human waste. For every bookstore, publisher, or content mill above there's a waste disposal tube running right through every writer's heart. The warmth of literacy is fueled by the bodies of the millions of contestants who happily throw another limb in the trough for one more go at the wheel of fortune. The sphinx never laughs, but keeps on spinning the next round.

If you are shocked and alarmed that the industry is like this, that anyone would actually wade the sewer without galoshes or a mask to collect coins then you missed the point and probably didn't read the book's introduction like 99% of students at a test. Millions of ways to collect coins; choose one that works for you. And may you never be put in a situation where the electric bill is due and you have to choose between weakness in your limbs or being warm.

If you don't write, consider this a kind of ghost story, with tips on how to make the ghost pay for every inch of flesh it chews. You can shudder with relief that you have not been bitten by the gold bug and put the book down wiser than before.

Personally, I think this kind of honesty is way overdue. Even if one cannot help but stick their arm in the grinder and suffer in writing hell, let them at least know the reasons and make informed, more conscious decisions. This stuff is brought to us into the daylight by someone who has been in the labyrinth and taken notes even as the minotaur peeled off his skin.

That by itself is worthy of respect. To articulate those notes and render them in a form that is useful and easy to read? Well done.

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## **Richard Wright says**

As a writer, I like to read at least a book a year by other writers, writing about writing. A bit circular, but there you go. I find it gives me a bit of perspective on my own approach to listen to others discussing theirs. Consider it the equivalent of water cooler chat at the workplace. Books like this are all a matter of perspective, in a literal sense. They're one person's point of view, usually a tract on 'what works for them'. They're not to be taken as gospel, and the key to a good tome is an author with the experience and honesty to explain without patronising. Mamatas has written full time for much of the last decade, and much of this book is about the choices he made in order to do so. It's funny, and extremely honest, and leaves little room for the sort of self-delusion most beginning writers have about the future that might await them if they can ditch the day job. Fiction, for example, can only be part of your portfolio, and Mamatas gives some excellent facts and figures about why writing non-fiction is a must (it pays far, far better, there are more opportunities, etc). A very worthwhile read, particularly for anybody considering whether they want to drive themselves towards a full time writing career.

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## **Grant Wamack says**

Starve Better by Nick Mamatas is a how-to-book for writers wishing to live solely off their words. Now I've wasted many hours reading books on how to write-the technical side and the business side and Mamatas is one of the more beneficial guides.

Many of the essays inside cover fiction and explore the mechanics of writing such as revision and story structure. The non-fiction side explains how make money off your words but the truth may not be what you expect. Also, he touches the subject of self-publishing and new publishing trends.

Mamatas' writing is clear and concise and he doesn't bullshit you about the publishing game.

The main message I got out of this was how bad do you want it? Do you want to sit around and make excuse why you're not writing or should you get up and start typing away?

Perseverance, drive, and a little originality can take you a long way.

Mamatas is a writer who has paid the bills off his writing and continues to do so to this very day. If you want to do the same, I would recommend reading Starve Better or else your starving just might get worse.

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## **Aksel Dadswell says**

Funny, honest, incredibly useful advice. If you're a writer, especially a fledgling one, you need to read this immediately.

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## **Andreea says**

Shows the hard work behind making it as a freelance writer and some of the skills involved in perfecting a

short non-fiction piece, or a short story. Does not sugar coat it. There is a lot discussed, as in how to make it by producing a lot of writing on a daily basis, and having connections to small publishing houses, online journals/magazines, etc. I wanted a little more from this book and the tone was a bit depressing. I wanted to read something inspiring, and granted, it is called "Starve Better" which kind of made me feel as if the writer was urging people NOT to write, which I don't think it's fair either because people write for different reasons, some to heal, some to reflect, others to record. I think he was addressing an audience of people who dream of "making it big." I do very much look forward to Mamatas's future work in science fiction though, I will read that! This book is still worth the read though

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## David says

I've read a lot of books about writing. I don't really read the "writer's advice" books anymore, because I don't need help with grammar and punctuation and I don't need to be told why it's bad to start your story with your protagonist waking up from a dream and examining herself in the mirror. But I like reading books by writers about writing. Of course I loved Stephen King's *On Writing*, and I also liked John Gardner's *On Becoming a Novelist*, even though if I ever do become a novelist, I'll be nothing like John Gardner (or Stephen King, for that matter).

Nick Mamatas is a professional writer. The traditional kind — the starving, write-anything-that-pays-the-rent kind who will rub your nose in your MFA aspirations and your bourgeois laptop-at-the-coffee-shop pretensions. *Starve Better* is a collection of essays and blog posts that is about half writing advice (or "advice") and half advice on how to make a living as a writer who has to scrounge up rent money this week. Mamatas has been a writing instructor, he's ground out articles for content mills and tiny, niche magazines, he's written a couple of books, and he also wrote a rather infamous piece called *The Term Paper Artist*, which I was surprised to reread in this book since I'd read it years ago and hadn't realized that was Nick Mamatas.

These are all interesting, entertaining, and unromanticized short pieces about the writing life. Mamatas tries to be a curmudgeon, but it's obvious he really does love writing, the art and the craft. He also loves taking the air out of dilettantes and blowhards and mocking the mockable. He has something of an online rep, not being afraid to piss people off by saying their writing probably sucks and they have bad taste.

If you really are one of those starving writers who means to make a living writing and aren't too proud to scrounge and hustle for whatever freelance jobs you can get, *Starve Better* seems to offer quite a bit of useful advice, though the publishing landscape is changing so quickly that as Mamatas admits in several of the articles, any advice about current markets will quickly become obsolete.

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## R.a. Deckert says

The best part of this book is the title, 'Starve Better.' It's brilliant.

The subtitle is: *Surviving the Endless Horror of the Writing Life*, which succinctly tells you what it's all about.

Any writer, or would be writer, has read a couple of hundred books like this. This is a run-of-the-mill book of this genre, neither startling good nor startling bad, just generally a good read and a lot of good advice.

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### **Lindsay says**

Kameron Hurley gave me this book last year, so thank you, Kameron! This book is a fabulous introduction to the real world of publishing. Because Mamatas is so prolific with short stories, he gives them the most time here, but he has plenty to say about other forms as well. If you want to write well, there are plenty of books out there to help you do that (Lamott, King, Zinsser, and of course Strunk and White come to mind). If you want to *publish* what you write, start here.

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### **Teodor says**

Frank and often hilarious collection of mini-essays and blog posts. Recommended for anyone looking to break into writing for the long haul, but also an entertaining insight into the life of the freelance writer in America, from MFA workshops to the ethically questionable (but, apparently, perfectly legal) art of writing term papers for a buck. Not all of the advice transcends international borders - for advice to be effective, it needs to be specific I suppose - but there's plenty of stuff that's transferable no matter what country you're based/are working in: cutting down your stories when they need to be cut down, the effective use of scene breaks, writing punchy and non-labour-intensive content for websites, etc.

Mamatas is no-bullshit but also non-aggressive, thankfully. He kicks your ass, but he's so grounded and real about the changes you need to effect to be a better writer, that it makes even the most grueling and harsh aspects of the process seem like a doable undertaking.

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### **Brittany says**

Excellent book on writing, I really loved the no-nonsense, snarky approach and the focus on genre fiction. He blows the cobwebs off of a lot of the conventional advice mantras and either convinces you they're ridiculous or reworks them to make them better. A fun and quick read with a lot of great information, highly recommended.

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### **Claire says**

Imma be honest here. Nick Mamatas came across like kind of a dick. I understand that this was not meant to be a hand-holding book, nor a misty-eyed celebration of Art and Life and The Mysteries of Creativity, but... he still came across like a dick.

Admittedly, while I have a lot of interest in writing, I have absolutely no interest in the short story or magazine market, so I'm probably not the target audience to begin with. Nick Mamatas is certainly not to blame for my own weird ambivalence about publishing. And he makes some excellent points on the subject of "what do we talk about when we talk about 'making a living' with writing?" That, I found really valuable

and interesting.

But his narrative voice still made me want to hit someone.

(Also, he referred, on several occasions, to people with depression as "depressives." I would have thrown the book across the room by the second instance if I weren't reading this electronically. It was gross and kind of offensive, but it wasn't worth the price of a new Nook.)

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### **Johann Thorsson says**

This is a great book for writers, especially genre short-story writers. Mamatas has been in the field for a long time, both as a writer and an editor. In *Starve Better* he gives advice on writing well and on how to earn money writing.

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### **Dave Versace says**

Straight-talking (even brusque) advice on getting paying gigs as a writer, disdaining high-minded notions of Muse-borne artistic integrity in favour of writing to briefs, paying attention to what editors want and not dying of consumption in a garrett somewhere. Some of the observations concerning ebooks and self-publishing are a little dated - I'd love to see what Nick Mamatas has made of the self-publishing revolution since 2010 or so - and I would personally draw the line at making a living from writing essays for lazy, incompetent or hopelessly out-of-their-depth college students.

But on the whole it's solid stuff, told without recourse to mollycoddling or sympathy. Write good or die, as someone else once put it.

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