

Memo: “I AS...”

Written by Bianca Goodloe

For all of those people who were told at any point in their formative years that due to the Labyrinthian nature of business and media (film studios, television networks, record labels, book publishers, etc.), you will never amount to more than a little splintering cog beneath the weight of the world’s heaviest wheel: this is your time. And you have the unlikely trailblazer EL James, author of “50 Shades of Grey” to thank for it. She is the proverbial stick of dynamite not only unleashing the self-publishing levy, but blowing the entire machine sky high, its airborne embers flashing like a beacon for all to follow.

So what exactly did she do? She decided one day to break out of the fan-fiction chrysalis and do a new act. Most people know “Fan-fiction” as self-published original stories based on pre-existing characters, commonly traded online at no cost. For EL James, by taking her pet project sexualizing the exploits of Twilight’s Edward and Bella, foisting them upon a set of original characters and refusing to wait around for some publisher to validate the fiction, she proclaimed her independence from the traditional gatekeepers of the book world, with the words “I AS Self-published Writer.” Since then, Fifty Shades of Grey has sold an astounding 40 million copies worldwide, been translated into over 30 languages, with book rights having been sold in 37 countries, setting the fastest-selling paperback record of all time, surpassing even the Harry Potter series. But EL James did not stop there. She raised the ante further proclaiming “I AS PRODUCER” when Universal and Focus Features came calling on the movie rights last March, for \$5,000,000 and a litany of unprecedented creative concessions afforded ‘producer’ EL James.

So could this happen again? It already has.

“Gabriel’s Inferno,” written by an anonymous author initially published for free online at Twighlighted.net, went on to sell 4,000 copies by Omnific, a small e-book publisher started by the founder of Twighlighted.net and has since been picked up by Berkley Books for a reported seven figure sum. So if this could happen again, and again, what does that mean?

It means the mutiny has begun. Not only are a new crop of previously obscure self-published authors coming out of the shadows and into the Twighlight, they are occupying over half of the New York Times list of the top 25 best selling self-published and fan fiction books, and changing the course of landfall for many new Hollywood

franchises. But why stop there? If the specters of power and access have been infiltrated in film and publishing, what about music?

“I AS Rock Star.”

Why drive to Memphis or Orlando and hawk your teeny-bopping wears for oily A&R men, when you can draft behind Justin Bieber. Yesterday he was an innocuous Canadian kid with a bowl haircut playing around on the internet. Toady, he is the self-published reincarnation of Elvis, adulterating the tweenage fantasies of adolescent girls from Oklahoma to Osaka. HE IS THE EL JAMES OF MUSIC.

With YouTube as the unmanned gangplank to a sea of self-published videos, episodic reality programming, cooking shows, travelogues, etc., not only can anyone declare themselves “I AS Star,” they can become their own hip-hop mogul, game show host, news anchor, video vixen. Ever heard of Kreashawn? 38.4 Million YouTube followers have, making her not just another just another 23-year-old high school drop-out, but a self-‘publishing-aire’ with an MTV Music Video Award nomination for Best New Artist, a record deal with Columbia, 300,000+ downloads on iTunes, a feature on Lil Wayne’s latest album, and a place in the annals of self-published internet porn, but that’s for another article...

“I AS Executive Producer”

But why stop there, when the sky’s the limit? What about if you want to be an Executive Film Producer? No problem. Just donate to Indiegogo or Kickstarter, and *Poof*, you’re an EP. And you wouldn’t be the first. Seventeen of the films selected for the 2012 Tribeca Film Festival utilized fan-based funding to partially finance their budgets, of the \$200 million in total pledged through Kickstarter. In exchange for as little as 1\$, anyone can prospectively be entitled to closing credit recognition, filmmaker meet-and-greets and private advance screenings in intimate settings: all the fruits of an executive producer’s labor.

“I AS Columnist”

If I haven’t yet succeeded in convincing you that we are the subversive generation storming the castle and overthrowing the old gate-keeping guard, perhaps this will. Take me as an example. I am an entertainment attorney who woke up one day and wanted to be a columnist. Today, I’m a blogger on the Huffington Post. And you are reading my copy. I did not have to get a journalism degree, work my way up the newsprint ladder or write a novel. I dared to envision “I AS Columnist,” and then I opened my laptop. I could just as easily have gone to Tumblr, and self-published my blog alongside 64 million other blogs (including Beyoncé’s and the Obama Campaign’s) for 11 billion monthly visitors.

But we aren’t just the self-publishing generation, we are the self-everything generation.

“I AS Astronaut”

When I said sky is the limit, I wasn't speaking metaphorically. I was being literal. I bet when Elon Musk's third grade teacher shrugged off his aspirations of space travel, little did the teacher know that his 'Space X' was to become the first privately-held company to send a spacecraft to the international space station. I wonder if Peter Thiel had the same homeroom teacher, because *not to be outdone*, his fellowship is financing future permanent, quasi sovereign ocean communities in international waters, elevating him past self-publishing status to the status of self-governing autocrat of his own floating nation: "***I AS Autocrat.***"

Yes, perhaps now having addressed both outer space and middle sea, we may be hitting the outer boundaries of this mutiny (at least for the time being). Nevertheless, that is a lot of territory to have covered in less than a decade, back when authors needed publishers, musicians were at the mercy of record labels and filmmaker were beholden to distributors for their work to be read, heard and seen, respectively. Today, the banner of our generation may include the skull and crossbones of Kim Dotcom but it also features the motto "I As *Anything*" emblazoned across millions of self-determined vessels, charging at Hollywood with the same velocity as toward the Milky Way (and not just in science-fiction movies). Meanwhile, I will be watching from the Crow's Nest for that next stick of dynamite for which to set course.