
JEFF BEZOS
AND THE FUEL
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FREE FUEL

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The telephone, once a simple means of communication, gradually became a way of sharing, talking, texting. And mobile phones overtook landlines. Everyone needed to talk. To let people know what?

Whether the husband was still at home and when he would leave, so the wife could let her lover in. Someone nobody knew. Or the usual family friend who came over at weekends.

Then the ringtone was always an intimidating signal for anyone about to do something out of the ordinary. And along came silent messaging: WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, Messenger, Direct, Viber, WeChat, Skype. To exchange messages, photographs, videos, every kind of situation. And for a long time this also helped the judicial authorities build their cases and make sure the guilty did not go unpunished.

But just when everything seemed to be working perfectly, I too began sending stories to my friends, to share my experiences and make them smile and think. Except I was not Amazon, and I was not Pornhub either. And failure was only the first real beginning of a success foretold.

Then, without my knowledge, a woman from Naples put together an archive of 300 stories. One day, on the phone, she told me: “I am going to see a publisher friend of mine in Naples. I will give him the stories to make a book, and then we will see.”

I smiled. But my answer was: “Whatever happens, we will always split everything fifty-fifty.”

She looked at me the way a mother looks at her youngest child, the one she thinks needs the most affection simply because he was the last to be born. But only mothers know that the youngest comes first when it comes to attention.

Three months later, she called to say that the publisher had rejected the project. He found repetitions, spotted information on the web. In a few words, between the lines, he was telling me I was a fraud who copied. He justified himself by saying that it was a

kind of literature unsuited to the current market, pioneering, something he would not publish.

So I asked my friend for a copy of her file, with my 300 stories in it. She told me that a bad power surge had fried her hard drive and that she no longer had a copy.

I thanked her. And in 15 days I rewrote all the stories, with the patience that has always distinguished me and just one thought to get me started: a rejection is simply a promotion to do better and do more.

I turned to an Italian publisher, who produced and published my first book: with no experience, I took advice from people who had been writing longer than I had, paid 1,500 euros and received the 50 complimentary copies specified in the contract. The book went out through all the publishing channels and is still available today, although, despite the legal demands, I have never been paid any royalties.

That was when I began to understand that the bandits had climbed down from the stagecoach and, without anyone noticing or realizing it, had settled into offices, calling themselves publishers. I am speaking exclusively about the publishers I dealt with directly, without naming them.

I have to follow my lawyer's advice, because if I had written "all publishers," the first lawsuits would have arrived. I would have been playing their game, not mine. Hahahahaha.

I thought it was an Italian phenomenon, so I went to America, where I published 14 books of 150 to 210 pages, still on sale today, including on Amazon. But I never saw any royalties, and the books remained on sale even after I withdrew permission to distribute them.

But being Calabrian, hard-headed, I looked for further confirmation, and the other publishers I dealt with directly all followed the same pattern: they took the books, published them and collected the money, did not pay me royalties and did not remove the publications, despite my requests as an independent author.

Then one day I arrived at AMAZON: the PUBLISHING BOSS.

Here the game reached the end of the line almost immediately. After I had published 40 books in 7 days, book no. 41 was published and, just 1 hour later, 10 emails arrived. Amazon accused me of manipulating its algorithm, blocked my account and told me it would not pay any royalties on the books I had published. In short, as I would put it, I had detonated their algorithm. But I had not made up the sales: 12 friends of mine, people identifiable by their first and last names, had bought my books precisely so I could carry out a concrete check on sales. And, as I experienced and documented, after my account was blocked, my books remained available and continued to sell for another 60 days, without the corresponding royalties being paid to me. My first success: giving Bezos money to fuel his yacht.

Then, to confirm what had happened before, I ran a test with a European publisher, STREETLIB, which published 100 ebooks in six languages in 30 days. They immediately reached all the European markets and universities, and sold more than 1,365 copies at 13.90 euros in less than 50 days.

When I began publishing more, they told me that they were paying for the ISBNs for the first 100 ebooks and that I would have to cover the cost for the next ones.

They also asked whether I wanted to extend distribution to other retailers, to make the offer more appealing.

They claimed that ISBNs served to protect the author. But an ISBN identifies an edition of a publication; it does not protect copyright. To me, presenting it as protection for the author was a lie. And the business built around ISBN management and publishing, as I had experienced it, ended up serving the publisher's interests, not mine.

I sent a certified email asking them to remove all the books from the market and telling them they could keep all the money, including the royalties already earned and those yet to accrue, so they could give their business a good injection of funds.

And then I decided to do everything myself. After an initial practice website, the current one was born, still as an independent author, with no sponsors and no protection.

It was like going to school, but I was only 60 and I wanted to understand what I was doing. Then I encountered ALPHABET, but I had no idea who the fuck they were. I thought it was a school for illiterate people run by an Indian, and I was not entirely wrong after all, because on my journey, if I wanted to learn, I would have to use binary code (0–1), not the human decimal system (2–3–4–5–6–7–8–9): the only way to succeed was to prove the opposite.

Inside a book there is a narrative, a story, an event, the construction, the layout, the cover, the translation. And then?

The web, if it pays attention to you, if it takes you seriously, if it thinks you are not a bandit, gives you value and indexes you in its own time. And then what happens?

Who is the web?

BING, GOOGLE, YANDEX, YAHOO. If you are in there, you really can say that every home where milk is boiled for breakfast in the morning is the same home that reads you.

Otherwise you have to settle for social media, where people tell stories about their neighbor. That makes the news.

If you then want to sell, you have to pay before you collect. It seems like the opposite of commerce, but it is just binary code.

You start with ADS campaigns, advertising, social media, consultants, agencies, and sharing what you produce with others, without knowing for certain what will end up in your pocket.

It is as if you were going to a casino: you know how much money you go in with, but you will never know how much you will come out with, and the casino owner never loses.

If you do not sell and give your work away, you are a problem. And just how big a problem you are is measured only by the body of work you produce, how you produce it and when you produce it.

And the value of your storytelling, the value you think will help you promote yourself, is forgotten. Even when the editorial quality of the content stands at 9 out of 10.

You do not fit the format. It is as if you walked into a shoe shop and asked for size 99, while the web and the entire publishing industry go up to size 50 at most, and not for everyone.

And then you look for advice. You are alone. Your family is the enemy because they do not understand, your friends are simply a splendid jealousy disguised as goodwill, and your enemies are really the spectators who admire you in silence.

Then, foolishly, you seek refuge in what AI has to say. You are intelligent; you know how these systems work. You have 10 of them to see whether their patterns align, and there are days when they tell you why you keep going and days when they tell you that you cannot go on, because everyone is afraid of the powerful and nobody stands up to the system.

If that were really the case, there would never have been wars, the only actions that guarantee us peace. You will think this is absurd: just reread human history, and you will be surprised to see that it is as I tell you.

IT WAS NEVER REALLY EASY, but always remember that it was never impossible, and women always recognize that, and only in people who are capable.