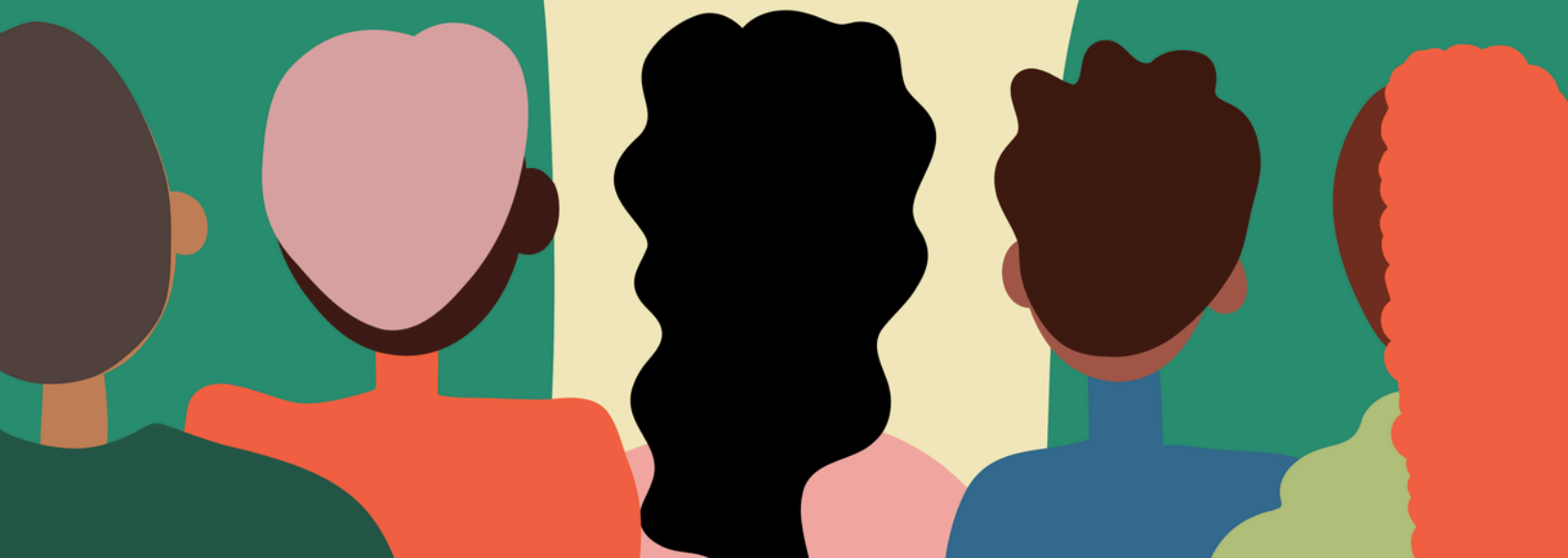
WRITER, BEWARE

a look at the distinctions among
different publishing paths
in order to dispel misinformation
and help writers avoid
predatory
publishers



MYTH:

There are only two publishing paths writers may take:

self-publishing

traditional publishing

FACT:

Since 2013, Jane Friedman has graciously been updating a set of charts about the various publishing paths writers may take.

Within traditional publishing, Friedman identifies six paths, including **Big 5**, **university presses**, and **small(er) presses**.

Under the category of non-traditional publishing, she identifies four paths, including **self-publishing**, **hybrid publishing**, and **paid publishing services**.

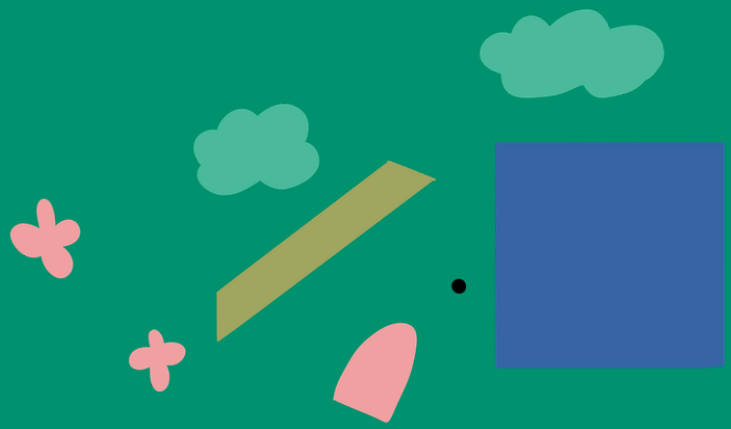
For each path, Friedman breaks down...

- how it's defined
- how the money works
- how the books are sold
- the professionals involved
- the value to the author
- how to get started
- what to watch out for and more.

These charts are available as PDFs to download FOR FREE here. Basically, Jane is a saint!

Some writers mistakenly reduce the many publishing paths to just two (traditional vs. self-publishing). Unfortunately, some "publishers" are scam artists, and when they scam writers who hold this binary view of publishing, the writers wrongly write off traditional publishing as a whole--when in fact,

THEY HAVEN'T BEEN WORKING WITH A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER AT ALL.

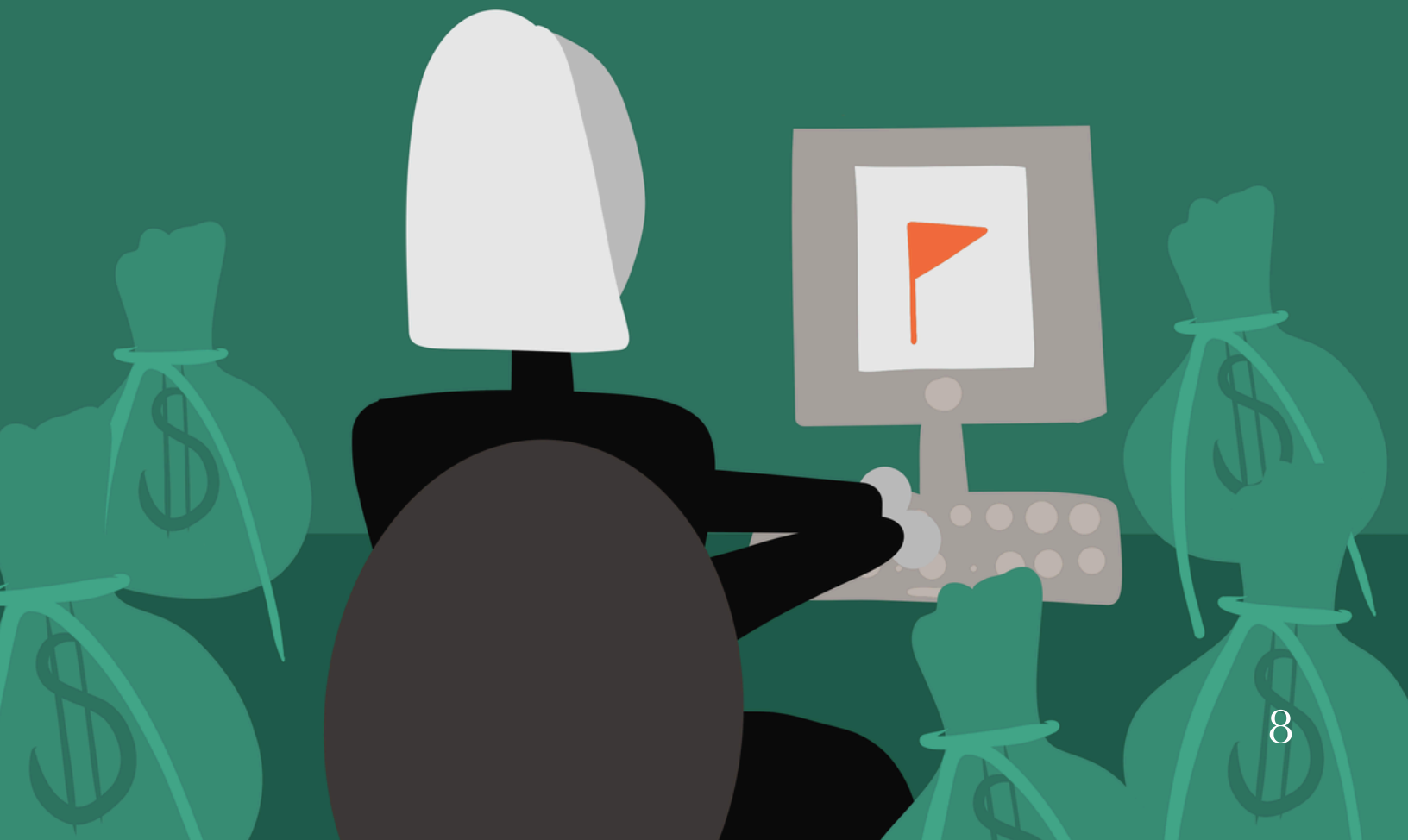


SO TO BE CLEAR:

If you're paying someone something, anything, to publish your book, that is not traditional publishing. For example, traditional publishers do not offer "packages" that the writer pays for to get their book published.

One of the non-traditional publishing paths Friedman lists, hybrid publishing, is defined in part as “publishers that require accepted authors to pay to publish or raise funds to do so.” The author signs a contract, and the publisher pays royalties. The publisher and the author share the costs and risks of publication.

Legitimate hybrid publishers are not scammers. They are not vanity presses.



"VANITY PUBLISHING" IS A TERM THAT GOES WAY BACK DECADES AND WAS USED TO DESCRIBE ANY ARRANGEMENT WHERE THE WRITER PAID A COMPANY TO PUBLISH THEIR WORK.

But these days, “vanity press” is more apt to describe a predatory publisher that charges exorbitant rates but doesn’t deliver on their promises re: the physical book, editing, design, marketing, promotion, distribution, etc.

UNFORTUNATELY, SOME PEOPLE USE “HYBRID PRESS” AND “VANITY PRESS” INTERCHANGEABLY, UNFAIRLY DISPARAGING THE AUTHORS WHO CHOOSE THIS PATH.

WORSE, SOME VANITY PRESSES NOW FALSELY BRAND THEMSELVES AS HYBRID PRESSES, PUTTING WRITERS EAGER TO PUBLISH AT RISK.

SO...HOW DO YOU SPOT A PREDATORY PUBLISHER?

1. Don't just read gushing testimonials provided by the publisher. Ask around. Use social media to find writers who have published with them. **Do they recommend them? Did the publisher deliver on their promises?**

2. Look at the covers and inside the books they've published. Is that the quality you want for your book?

3. **Trust your gut/intuition. If it doesn't feel right, don't do it.**

4. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

CHECK OUT THESE AND OTHER RESOURCES ON WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN CONSIDERING A HYBRID PUBLISHER:

- **Interview with Jane Friedman** on hybrid publishing
- **Hybrid Publishers and Paid Publishing Services: Red Flags to Watch For** by Joel Pitney
- **Is Hybrid Publishing The Best Option for Authors?** By Dytodo Vox
- **The Worst Way To Publish Your Book: Vanity Press (Or Subsidy Publishing)** by Dytodo Vox

Publishing is an uphill climb, whatever legitimate path you take. You may be tempted to ignore red flags or not ask around because you really, really want to be published—–and you think it's that sketchy press that's wooing you or nothing. That another opportunity won't come along.

It may be hard to turn down a risky offer that feels like the only offer you'll get.

BUT DO IT ANYWAY.

DEESHA PHILYAW
LINK: https://deeshaphilyaw.com/

BIO
Deesha Philyaw's debut short story collection, The Secret Lives of Church Ladies, won the 2021 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, the 2020/2021 Story Prize, and the 2020 LA Times Book Prize: The Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction and was a finalist for the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction. Deesha is a Kimbilio Fiction Fellow, a Baldwin for the Arts Fellow, a United States Artists Fellow, and co-host of two podcasts, Ursa Short Fiction (with Dawnie Walton) and Reckon True Stories (with Kiese Laymon). She is currently at work developing TV shows based on her short fiction.

Deesha's debut novel, The True Confessions of First Lady Freeman, is forthcoming from Mariner Books, an imprint of HarperCollins, in 2026.

DIAMONDE WILLIAMSON
LINK: https://diamondewilliamson.com

BIO
Diamonde Williamson is a Writer, Artist, Illustrator and the Head Creative at Deep Feelers Club, a creative arts company specializing in publishing, art and spiritual and physical wellness awareness. Previously, she led third & wonder production house, a video production company with notable clientele like: The Oprah Winfrey Network, Google, Warner Bros., Essence, and more.

Most recently, Diamonde published her second book, *Deeply Personal: Notes from Facing My Mother Wound,* featuring memoiric notes from a very transformational time in her life, the moment she came to accept the truth about her childhood, and her mother.

Diamonde's mission is to create art, books and events that center truth, vulnerability and healing.

END CREDITS:

The **original Threads post by @_elizabethmay** that inspired this effort:

The Key Book Publishing Paths: 2025–2026 by Jane Friedman