

The fine art of procrastination.

For writers, it's also the bane of deadlines and the arch-villain of productivity.

For me, the vast majority of procrastination comes courtesy of the Internet. Writing is a solitary job. A chance—*any* chance—to socialize with like-minded people isn't just taken, it's eagerly seized with both hands. Twitter is my kryptonite. That's how I get my book industry news and keep up with writer /agent/editor friends. It's like an office water cooler for writers. We may write for a living, but we do like to cluster together and talk shop, better still if we can do it while imbibing adult beverages. (If you're at a conference or convention and wonder where all the writers are, just find the hotel bar.)

I don't remember how I procrastinated before the Internet came along, but I'm sure I found something to lure me away from the humongous manual typewriter I wrote my first two "practice novels" on. Procrastination and writing go hand in hand. Nowadays most writers do their work on computers, and most of those computers are connected to the Internet. Some writers can claim research as an excuse. I can't. I'm a fantasy writer; what I write, I make up. I don't need the Internet for that. I'm incredibly productive at my family's mountain cabin — no Internet, no TV, three radio stations. I get an amazing amount of work done. Hmm, I wonder why?

It's not just the computer's fault. Actually, it's completely *my* fault; the computer is just an innocent bystander, a tool of procrastination. When I'm working on a particularly tough section of a book, I also have what has to be the cleanest house in the neighborhood. I get an inexplicable need to do five loads of laundry, dust the bookcases, clean the cat box (okay, that's a *real* need), empty the dishwasher, and ooh, looky, there's three bananas left. Must. Bake. Banana bread.

I like to tell myself that I'm merely allowing time for a particularly juicy plot point to stew, or that I'm multitasking, or that I'm "taking a writing break." Yeah. Right. What I'm doing is avoiding the book. Writing is hard work. Contrary to what non-writers probably think, words just don't fall out of our heads onto the page. Aside from being messy, it just doesn't happen that way. For me there's the pressure (and fear of failure) to get the vividness of the scene running like a movie in my head onto the page. A book that's not finished is a book that doesn't suck. But when you're under contract and on deadline, not finishing is not an option.

So, what's the solution to procrastination? Having someone yell "sit down!" every time I start to stand up would work (well, might work). Saying "no" to procrastination takes the same discipline and dedication that drove me to not give up during those years of submitting books and getting rejected.