



IP ITeasers post 082:

Book Blurb Bonanza

"Erasmus described Thomas More's Utopia as "divine wit", an early example of one author proffering a favourable comment of another's work. Since then, and in particular in the last couple of decades, a whole industry has arisen in the procuring and provision of dust jacket blurbs. The whole system is open to abuse on many different levels. First, authors and their agents pro-actively seek quotes, preferably from established organisations or figures such as well-respected literary journals or proven authors, but better still (and increasingly so) from celebrities with name-recognition, despite their lack of relevant knowledge. However, secondly, these desirably-quotable persona often receive so many requests that it would be practically impossible for them to read all the books for which they have provided a pithy remark, and so the quote might not be based upon any actual consideration of the book in question. Thus, thirdly, given such a demand, the most sought-after can demand payment of one kind or another for the provision of a sentence or two that might enhance sales by thousands of copies. Further, fourthly, the actual wording of the blurb might be drafted by a minion, with the cherished celebrity merely signing-off on the contribution. Fifthly, and finally, it is very difficult for an unknown entity to secure such a valuable endorsement, and that means that the already accepted prosper, while the disadvantaged suffer – the perpetuation of discrimination against the new-comer in favour of the established (or at least, the currently in vogue). This in turns leads to the sclerosis of the system and so a denial of innovation and a proper appreciation of talent, which leads inevitably to it becoming meaningless. It has been suggested by one publisher, Mark Richards of Swift Publishing, that there should be a moratorium on blurbs, but that "won't happen, so like hamsters we'll be on the quote treadmill until we finally fall off". As Marx said of capitalism, the roots of its own downfall lie within itself."