

# SURVIVING A CON AS AN AUTHOR

By Virginia G. McMorrow

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## Surviving a Con as an Author: Or, FAQs for the Faint-Hearted

### How do I break the ice when attendees and panelists already know each other?

Take a deep breath! Many people are just as shy and welcome a newcomer. Everyone is there for the fun of it. The local fans want to meet authors, and authors want to increase their fan base. Many of those local fans are stressed volunteers at the convention, so remember to thank them for all their hard work. Other authors, hopefully, will not look at you as a competitor (though many will) but as a colleague.

Talk to everyone you can. Go to group dinners. Hang out. Be accessible. Make your face known. And remember, you're always "on stage." Don't say anything you'll regret in public about another author's work, even if you hate it. There's a polite way to express your opinion, and if you can't be polite, then be quiet. A potential fan may be turned off by your lack of discretion. Be yourself, and you'll do fine.

### Do booksellers bite?

They really won't bite your head off. They've set up a stall in the dealers' room to sell books—hopefully, *your* books. And when you hand them ArcheBooks' great informational material, they're more than willing to check out the website ([www.archebooks.com](http://www.archebooks.com)) and purchase copies of your books as well as that of your fellow authors.

### Should you flee the room if there's only one fan in the audience?

Of course not, that would be insulting. Just pray that the person is really enthusiastic and willing to ask questions. Welcome the individual and talk about why he or she came to the panel, reading preferences, opinions on the topic, and so on. Keep the conversation lively, and keep it fun.

### What if some of your fellow participants monopolize the panel?

Although the moderator should be monitoring the panelists' behavior, if that doesn't happen, remind the audience that you're there, too, and that you have something to say. Make your comment witty or pertinent—not malicious—and remember, don't sit there like a lump. Would you buy a book from someone who had nothing to contribute to the discussion? And if your colleagues take the topic really far off on a tangent, gently and politely guide it back. If you don't, the audience might start to trickle out the door and lump you in with the other panelists.

### **If the moderator doesn't introduce you, what should you say about yourself?**

Give a bullet-point introduction to your background, experience, and publishing credits. Don't drone on and on. If you can add humor, do so. And don't forget to mention the title of your book(s) that should be proudly displayed beside your name.

### **What if they ask you a question about your writing that you never considered?**

Sit there and look wise for a moment. Don't blurt out, "I never thought about that!"—unless, of course, it's really something farfetched and you won't look like a fool for not knowing the answer. After all, if you love writing and your own characters, then the answer should come relatively easy. Before the panel, consider your book, the story line, the theme, why you wrote it, where the idea came from, why you chose a particular character, and so on. Think about things you never consciously thought about before, because, sooner or later, your audience will.

### **What do you do with promotional material?**

Put it everywhere! There's usually a freebie table where you can place bookmarks, flyers, postcards, etc. Stack them up beside your book when you're on a panel. Hand out bookmarks every time someone, in the lobby, at the bar, on the train (there's always someone on the same train going to the same convention), and so on, asks about your book. If you buy something in the dealers' room, give that dealer a bookmark, too!

### **What if there's a lull in the action and you're bored?**

Find a comfortable chair, pull out a notebook, and write down your observations. There are enough characters and funny behavior to start a new novel.

### **Are regional conventions worth the time and money?**

Sure. They're a great way to learn the ropes and meet people who enjoy the same things you do. They're smaller, more informal, and far less intimidating.

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**About the Author:** Virginia McMorrow is the author of two fantasy novels, *Mage Confusion* (ISBN 1-59507-024-9, ArcheBooks Publishing) and *Mage Resolution* (ISBN 1-59507-047-8, ArcheBooks Publishing), which comprise books One and Two of the Tuldamorán Trilogy. Book Three, *Mage Evolution* will be released in 2005.