



## Who Wrote That? Why Authors Use Pen Names

By Bianca Smith • March 05, 2018



Have you ever read a book by a new author and thought the style was familiar? There's a chance it was written by one of your favorite authors. Over time, many authors have forgone their name appearing on [The New York Times Best Sellers](#) list to use a pseudonym. Some authors have more than 10 pen names, and they're just the ones we know about. That sounds absurd to many of us, but the authors have their reasons.

### Hiding in Plain Sight

We're assuming you know that [Dr. Seuss](#) is a pseudonym (few are born with amazing names) but do you know why he used one? It was because he was fired from Jack-o-Lantern magazine as editor-in-chief. Theodor Geisel broke the law with a party during prohibition and lost his job because of it. He then continued writing for the magazine using his middle name, Seuss, to fool the magazine's administration. He added the Dr. title because his father would have preferred he go into medicine.

[Richard Matheson](#) and [Isaac Asimov](#) have also used pen names to hide their identities. Richard started when editors dramatically changed his work, and he felt it was no longer his. Isaac was asked to write a science fiction series to be adapted to television. He thought television at the time was terrible, so he published the [Lucky Starr series](#) under the name Paul French.

### Man or Woman?

It's disappointing, but we accept that [S.E. Hinton](#) had to use her initials to prevent male book reviewers dismissing female-written novels; it was the 1960s. However, [Joanne Rowling](#) was asked to do the same (but for boy readers) with the [Harry Potter series](#). She borrowed her grandmother's name to make a second initial.

### Too Many Books

In the 1970s and 1980s, publishers decided authors would be less popular if they published more than one book a year. It's another idea from the past that's now seen as illogical, but it was a hindrance to [Stephen King](#) and [Dean Koontz](#). Dean published as many as eight books a year in the 1970s, with more than 10 pen names.

### Pigeonholing

Confusing readers by writing different genres is the reason many authors use pen names. The concern is understandable. [J.K. Rowling's](#) fans reacted harshly to [The Casual Vacancy](#). Writing different genres is the reason why [Dean Koontz](#) has more than 10 pen names to cover all the genres. [Anne Rice](#) became [A.N. Roquelaure](#) and [Anne Rampling](#) to pen erotic novels. And [Agatha Christie's](#) romance novels are under the name Mary Westmacott.

### Are They a Good Writer or Just Famous?

[Stephen King](#) and [J.K. Rowling](#) are as complex as their characters and their pen name justifications put them on nearly every list here. While also avoiding market saturation, [Richard Bachman](#) was created because [Stephen King](#) wanted to know if his books were good or sold because of the first movie adaptation. Amusingly, after a bookstore clerk noticed the writing similarities, Stephen King admitted the rouse and declared [Richard Bachman](#) died from "cancer of the pseudonym." There are reports that it was a similar reason for J.K. Rowling's [Robert Galbraith](#) for the [Cormoran Strike](#) series.

### Because They Can

Judith Rumelt Lewis started writing fanfiction as [Cassandra Clare](#) many years before her first professionally published work. We can't find her reason for using a pen name, but assume it could have been wanting something a little more glamorous for an alter-ego. [Mark Twain](#) is also a pen name. Again, we don't know the reason why Samuel Langhorne Clemens chose a name based on the phrase used to describe water that is two fathoms deep, but it's nerdy-cool.

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Books mentioned in this article

Oh, the Places You'll Go!  
Dr. Seuss  
from: **\$3.99**

I Am Legend and Other Stories  
Richard Matheson  
from: **\$4.19**

I, Robot  
Isaac Asimov  
from: **\$3.99**

David Starr, Space Ranger  
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The Outsiders  
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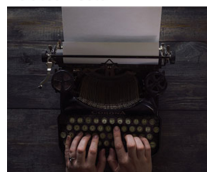
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