



## FeedBooks : Blog

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## **Published on Feedbooks #1: L. Lee Lowe**

Last week, a fifth self-published book passed the 10.000 downloads mark ([see top books](#)). To celebrate this, we'll be conducting interviews with various authors published on Feedbooks for a few weeks.

Our first interview will be with L. Lee Lowe, author of "*Mortal Ghost*" and currently serializing "*Corvus*" on Feedbooks.

*Lee is an online writer who was born in New York and educated in the United States, France, and Germany. She spent eighteen years living and working in Zimbabwe, where her five children were also born. Now she lives in the hills above the Rhine near Cologne, Germany. When she's not busy trying to restrain her dog Gypsy, a border-collie mix, from herding the local cows, horses, and vociferous crows, she can be found at her desk with her router disconnected while she writes.*

**Hello Lee, you were one of the first authors to self-publish on Feedbooks and "*Mortal Ghost*" was downloaded over 10.000 times. How did you discovered the service and how does it fit in your distribution/marketing strategy ?**

**I can't remember how I first learned of Feedbooks, and now it feels as if the service has always been available – a bit like Google, you can no longer imagine a world without it! It must have been one of those website lists of e-book sources, possibly from Lifehacker, which I studied when I first began to publish online.**

My distribution/marketing strategy is, sadly, very haphazard, though I do try to list my work with all the e-book and podcasting sites. There are online writers who spend a fair amount of energy promoting their work, often in quite innovative ways, but aside from the occasional email and/or comment at relevant blogs/websites, I tend to do less and less of this sort of thing, because it's time stolen from writing and reading, time I can ill afford. There is so much I want to learn, so much I want to read, so much I want to try! And I've withdrawn from all social websites and communities, because they're unhelpful, providing me with few readers and generally worthless criticism. In any case, I measure success against the very best writing, not in terms of numbers or sales. Readers will have to look after themselves.

**Why do you self-publish? Have you ever considered conventional publication?**

Despite its stigma, self-publishing has respectable and even venerable antecedents — Marcel Proust, for example — though undoubtedly a much larger number of truly deplorable ones.

Publishing is essentially a means to an end: a technology for distributing a writer's words to readers. Once this was only practicable via a printing press. Obviously, this is no longer the case. Writers are now able to take charge of their own work, a thoroughly enabling process once they relinquish their prejudices and refuse to play the 'insider game', yearning to become one of the elect, one of the chosen; anointed by a publisher's ink. This places the burden of responsibility for writing well precisely where it belongs: on the writers themselves.

This doesn't mean that I would refuse to publish my work conventionally, though I don't actively seek to do so. After all, I still buy and collect, read and cherish printed books. However, I'm a fervent advocate of 'open culture' — perhaps because of my many years in Zimbabwe — and would always insist on free online and electronic access to my fiction.

**You distribute serialized fiction on your blog, weekly podcasts and complete versions of your books on Feedbooks. Do you think that they appeal to different kind of readers ?**

**It's something of a truism that blogged fiction needs to be short and punchy—plot-driven—to hold online readers, but it's very difficult for me to judge just how far this is true. In general, I suspect that the slower readers, the ones likely to linger over a sentence or paragraph, tend to prefer a complete version, though the large number of *Mortal Ghost* downloads may also be due to other factors. And how far do downloads translate into readers? Any feedback is so anecdotal that I'm really unable to evaluate the type(s) of readers I have. Nor do I have any idea if those who listen to the podcasts, which are very popular, also download the texts or (re)read online as well.**

**Is the serialization simply a good way to distribute your book or do you gather feedback from it ?**

**Minimal feedback. Community destroys the imagination, which is always solitary.**

Then why do I like serialisation? For all the usual reasons relating to tension and anticipation, plus it gives me a chance to revise over a long period of time.

**For how long have you been working on *Corvus* ? Did you finished writing the full novel before the serialization started ?**

Four years — I'm a plodder, an obsessed plodder, but a plodder nevertheless! I finished the full novel before serialisation began, because I wouldn't be able to sleep at night otherwise. The revisions I make afterwards tend to be rather minor, though on occasion I've added a sentence or two, chosen a more effective phrase, deleted something which no longer seems to work. Looking back at earlier writing can be painful, and there are times when I'm tempted to rewrite *Mortal Ghost*, say, from the ground up. But then I'd never move on to new work.

**What are you working on now?**

At the moment I'm writing short stories, a form I love but neglected while working on *Corvus*. It will take me a while to decide where I'd like to go with my next novel, particularly since it will likely be another long-term commitment, at least three or four years of hard work. Writing is never easy for me, and the more technical skill I acquire, the harder it becomes.

When I have eight or ten short stories ready for publication, I plan to publish them in a single e-book edition via Feedbooks.

**For both *Mortal Ghost* and *Corvus*, you found a different voice for the weekly podcast. How does an author find the right person for an audiobook edition?**

In both cases I've been very lucky to find such committed narrators, who earn nothing from the hours and hours of work. In my case I found them through a mutual online acquaintance, a blogger playwright/publisher interested in my fiction. One suggestion I have for others writers who don't care to read their own podcasts is to approach student actors, who are often happy for the experience and exposure. The drama schools and university theatre departments may be the first places to try.

Blog: <http://lleelowe.com>

[Find Lee on Feedbooks](#)

## Read our books in a browser

Aside from applications such as [Stanza on the iPhone](#) and [Aldiko on Android](#), several services use our API to search and import e-books.

[Bookworm](#) and [Bookglutton](#) are both web-based services designed to read EPUB files. Bookworm provides both a normal and mobile version of its service, while Bookglutton is based around the idea of a social reading experience with support for shared annotations.

With its latest update, Bookworm displays a list of most popular books from Feedbooks, while Bookglutton can perform a search on Feedbooks to import books. With both services, you can also use the URL of an EPUB book on Feedbooks to import your book.

## Featured Books: Quick Reads

Looking for a quick read ? You'll find plenty of short fiction on our [Original Books section](#). Among the new releases you'll find:

- [Three new short stories from P.J. Lyon](#)
- [The first twovel \(twitter + novel\) from Small Stories](#), who also published an excellent [collection of microfiction](#)
- [Horror short stories from Alwyne Ashwethe](#)

## New Design #1

I've been talking about a full redesign on both [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) lately, and even published the first screenshots of the new design.

It's time to explain why we're working on a new design: to make Feedbooks easier to use through a simple and consistent layout.

The first thing that you'll notice about our new global navigation is that we renamed the sections. "Discover" is renamed into "Public Domain" and "Share" into "Original Books". While the books published in the "Public Domain" section are author-centric (points to a specific page with various metadata), the books published in "Original Books" are user-centric, and will point out directly to the profile of the user.

We'll gradually introduce new interactions between readers and authors to make the promotion of a book much easier. You'll notice that compared to the current design, comments, favorites and downloads are now highlighted a lot more to serve this purpose and new links to automatically post a book on Twitter/Facebook are now available.

## Aldiko: EPUB reader for Android with Feedbooks integration

### What is Aldiko?

Aldiko is an ebook reading application that runs on any Android phone and which enables you to easily download and read thousands of books right on your smartphone.

We're glad to announce that this new EPUB reading system, capable of downloading content directly from Feedbooks is now available. We've worked with our friends at Aldiko to make this experience as seamless as possible: it is actually based on the same Atom catalog format that we're using for Stanza. I'm glad that we finally have a second reading system committed to implement the future OPDS standard, and Aldiko actually implements some of the recommendations that we recently submitted.

Once again, Feedbooks is the first platform available on a new reading system. We've been very successful with Stanza (Neelan recently announced that 8 million EPUB files have been distributed on Stanza. 75% of these files came from Feedbooks) and hope to have a similar success with any new reading system on the market. The Android platform is very attractive and with 18 new Android-based devices in 2009, it should get some significant share of the smartphone market.

**Update:** In-depth review at the Gadgeteer

## Extending Atom: Thoughts on OPDS #2

First of all, Roger Sperberg wrote an excellent comment about the current OPDS draft:

With blogging, the Atom feed entry ought to include either a **content** child — containing the full blog post or a link to it (and the link relationship identified as 'alternate') — or a **summary** child whose content is an extract, abstract or short summary of one of the three types above.

If OPDS is a catalog of books, then there's a mismatch between the blog model and the catalog model. The **content** in the catalog is material about a book, and the feed therefore ought to have the full material in **content** or a **summary** of it. A **link** child of **content** should take the feed's consumer to that "full material."

So maybe the catalog copy shouldn't be likened to blog posts.

Then **content** could contain a link to the epub, and the catalog description would go into **summary**. Of course, the full descriptions in the catalog might be too long to use as intended in this type of feed.

In that case, just create a new type of relationship link, as was done in the examples for cover image and thumbnail, that describes whether this longer content is a synopsis, review or just longer description.

I agree with most of this comment. It makes more sense to use **content** for the EPUB file and **summary** for the description. We should also extend Atom rather than describe everything in XHTML: using DublinCore to describe the language, copyright status, publication date and other metadata.

### **Partial entry/Full entry**

The current draft is full of new rel values, a design choice that we should avoid as much as possible (most of the time, a type and a rel value registered at the [IANA link registry](#) would be enough).

To support entries with longer content, as recommended by Roger Sperberg, we don't need a new relationship link. In AtomPub:

Clients MUST NOT assume that an Atom Entry returned in the Feed is a full representation of an Entry Resource and SHOULD perform a GET on the URI of the Member Entry before editing it.

In the same RFC5023 for AtomPub, the “type” parameter was defined:

This specification defines a new “type” parameter for use with the “application/atom+xml” media type. The “type” parameter has a value of “entry” or “feed”.

Neither the parameter name nor its value are case sensitive.

The value “entry” indicates that the media type identifies an Atom Entry Document. The root element of the document MUST be atom:entry.

The value “feed” indicates that the media type identifies an Atom Feed Document. The root element of the document MUST be atom:feed.

If not specified, the type is assumed to be unspecified, requiring Atom processors to examine the root element to determine the type of Atom document.

Thanks to this type parameter, it’s fairly easy to point from a partial entry to a full entry using a `link@rel="alternate"`

```
rel="alternate" type="application/atom+xml;type=entry" href="
```

For sources with a RDF document available (such as O’Reilly, and Feedbooks in the upcoming weeks), the same `link@rel="alternate"` could be used with `application/rdf+xml`.

### **Controlled vocabularies**

The publication metadata required and allowed in OPF, should have the same status in OPDS.

Once the goals for OPDS are clearly defined (oops), we might extend this.

Any provider should be allowed to use additional extensions in their full entries.

### **Relationship to AtomPub**

To allow such things as comments/reviews, OPDS could also support AtomPub. With both the Atom Threading Extension and the current work on Collection Discovery, it should be fairly simple to support.

## **New Features in Web Publishing UI**

Along with our work on the API, we're also releasing new features for the web publishing UI.

### **Re-order elements**

You can now switch to the Table of Contents (ToC) of your book while editing, to drag & drop parts/chapters/sections and re-order them the way that you want. Nested ToC re-ordering is supported, which means that you could create a new chapter, move to the ToC and drag & drop several sections into this chapter.

You can also change the type of an element, for example if you don't need a chapter header anymore, you can turn a chapter into a section.

### **Sub-sections**

Sections can have several levels of sub-sections now. With sections & sub-sections it should be very easy to create any structure that you'd like for your book.

## Hierarchy support for AtomPub

Creating a powerful API for publishing is currently our top priority, and to improve our AtomPub service we recently added support for hierarchy in AtomPub.

[Nikunj R. Mehta](#) & [Colm Divilly](#) recently released 2 Internet-Drafts: [one about collection discovery](#) and the other [one about hierarchy](#).

Internet-Drafts are still works in progress, but since the behavior for collection discovery was already [described in a previous RFC](#), and the rel values used in the hierarchy draft are consistent with those registered at the [IANA link registry](#), we decided to implement both of these drafts.

### Collection discovery

Collections can be discovered in our feeds now (for example `/book/id/contents.atom`), and they're not limited to the service document anymore. In the feed for a book you'll find the following code:

```
href="http://www.feedbooks.com/book/id/contents.atom">
  >application/atom+xml;type=entry>
  Add new entries>
    fixed="yes">
      term="Part"/>
      term="Chapter"/>
      term="Section"/>
      term="Text"/>
    >
  >
```

### Hierarchy

Hierarchy is supported through:

```
rel="down" ah:count="2" href="..." />
```

`ah:count` is used to count the number of entries in the child feed, and in the child feed you'll get a new collection to add new entries.

## Featured Book: Suggested Oddities

A Carnival of the strangest freaks, interstellar music critics and magical gibbons are just some of the oddities you'll meet in this collection of 15 stories inspired by suggestions from members of [Mobileread.com](http://Mobileread.com).

A collection of short stories by [PJ Lyon](#).

## Publishing an e-book with Windows Live Writer

Several e-books self-published on Feedbooks started as blogs (or books ?) first, such as *Mortal Ghost* or *obnoxious librarian from hades*.

Thanks to our new AtomPub service, it is now possible to use blog editing softwares such as Windows Live Writer (on Windows obviously) or MarsEdit (for Mac OS X) to publish new chapters of your book both on your blog and on Feedbooks.

First of all, you'll have to create the book on Feedbooks. While you can manage the content of your book with these tools, they're not capable of creating the book itself.

Once you're done, just add a new blog account in Windows Live Writer, and select "Other" for the type of the blog.

Enter <http://www.feedbooks.com> as the URL of the blog along with your username/password. Windows Live Writer will automatically discover our AtomPub service and list your books. Select the right one and you can start publishing new items in your book !

As we continue to improve and extend our AtomPub service, expect more and more integration for Feedbooks into various publishing tools.



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