Getting an Agent's Attention in 2020: How to Get Noticed Using Popular Platforms Like Pitch Wars or Twitter Pitch Parties

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Hello, and welcome to my LDSPMA session. As you know from the introduction that was just given my name is Madeleine Dresden, and I'm here to talk a little bit about my experience with going through pitch wars and also some tips and tricks for going through some Twitter pitch parties and things like that. We'll be focusing on one called pit mad.

But it's wonderful to be here today. I wish I could see you in person, so we could feed off of each other's energy. But, alas, I am grateful for the technology and the means to still be here with you today. So let's jump right in. Give me one second to start sharing my presentation with you. I have a very long title, as you can see.

Alright, so my presentation, as you know, is titled: "Getting an agent's attention in 2020, how to get noticed using popular platforms like pitch wars or Twitter pitch parties." Now, I would like to endearingly truncate this presentation to Tweeter Tweeter Agent Meeter. I'm not entirely sure why that title was shot down so quickly. I like it, and so I'm going to use it today.

And so, if you come across me again, you're at BYU or at Target or something, if you say, "I saw Tweeter Tweeter Agent Meeter," I will know exactly what you're talking about. Because this title is a little hard to memorize.

Okay, so what are we covering today? Two different online opportunities to help you get an agent's attention. So the first one being pitch wars which is a way to find industry professionals who can help you through the agent-finding process.

The second thing we'll talk about is pit mad, which is an online opportunity to have agents come to you on social media and requests materials. And for both of these, we'll be covering some tips and tricks to catching a mentor or agent's attention using these online platforms. So what types of skill sets you'll need to to capitalize on these opportunities.

So we're going to start with pitch wars, because I think that while they're they're run by the same people (pitch wars and pit mad), pitch wars is a much more thorough, lengthy process. And so it's my opinion that by going deeply into pitch wars and what that querying processes is like to get in, it will also help inform your experience with pit mad, because even if you choose to do the Twitter pitch party, you will still need to be querying agents instead of querying mentors. So a lot of the same skills will apply to either one. So we'll spend most of our time today talking about pitch wars and then talking about how these same skills can apply to pit mad. Okay, so what is pitch wars? This is taken directly from their website, which is...

You're free to access it at will. So feel free. Pitch wars is not really a contest, though there is a level of competition in that you are competing for mentors to get their attention and to be chosen by them. But what it really is at its heart is a mentoring program where published or agented authors editors, industry interns or professionals or whatnot receive submissions and applications from people who would like to learn from them, and then they pick one person out of all of their applicants to mentor for the next three months. And in that process, what they will do is help you get your manuscript to a ultra-polished shine to where it's ready to be seen and evaluated by agents who could then offer representation to you.

And they will also help you through that querying process. So they'll help you with pitches and queries and submission materials and whatnot. So it's a very unique and amazing opportunity.

And then following the revision process, pitch wars ends with an agent showcase which is, basically, you will put some of your materials online on the pitch wars website. And then there are agents who have registered to participate in pitch wars, and they will come to that website, evaluate, and start making requests, so much like pit mad which we'll talk about as well. This is a way to get a mentored help to get an agent's attention within a week, I think. Or maybe it's like three days.

I think it is like a week—the agent showcase. So here are a few more details if you're feeling like this is intriguing and you'd like to maybe think about participating in this. If you write adult young adult or middle grade, and considering this is fiction track session for LDSPMA, I'm going to assume we're all fiction writers here. So you probably fall under one of these categories.

You must be unagented, because that's kind of the selling points of pitch wars, is this unique opportunity to get an agent's in a way that kind of cuts through a lot of the waiting time of cold querying. You do also have to have a finished and polished novel in order to participate in pitch wars, so please do not apply or submit to mentors and also, likewise, do not submit to agents or participate in pitt mad if you do not have a finished novel.

That is a requirement. So here is what the agent showcase kind of looks like. This is from a book that was chosen called "Dusk Before Dawn.

And this was written by Roseanne Brown. You can see that agents are looking at what kind of categories is this. What's the genre? What's the word count? And then they'll see a pitch that you and your mentor will put together.

So in this case, it's "Ember in the Ashes" meets "Caraval" in African-myth inspired fantasy. To save his sister's life, teen refugee Malik enters a magical competition to gain the trust of the princess he must kill— not knowing Princess Karina plans to sacrifice the winner to resurrect her dead mother. So this is kind of turning into a bit of a what if Aladdin and Jasmine were trying to kill each other situation. And then following that pitch, you will also include about a first pages' worth of an excerpt. And so this is the information that you and your mentor will be putting together along with revising your novel, so that when agents come to the agent showcase, there's, below this section is a comments area where they can say, "This is so-and-so and I would like to see your full manuscript. Please query me at email address" and whatnot.

So again, this is what they're going to be seeing. This is what you're working toward. And this is the kind of opportunity that pitch wars presents to you. And the reason I picked this entry for pitch wars is because Roseanne Brown was my mentor, so she went through the process and then wanted to give back. So she decided to become a mentor and I was ultimately lucky enough to go through the pitch wars process with her by my side.

And this book "Dusk Before Dawn" eventually turned into the instant New York Times bestselling novel, "A Song of Wraiths and Ruin." If you have not checked that out yet, I highly recommend it. It is a great book.

Okay, so if this has piqued your interest and you are indeed hoping to apply or submit to pitch wars, The things we're going to talk about today are items two and three on the slide show: preparing a query letter and writing that dreaded one page single-spaced synopsis. Item number one—that's a completely different presentation, I would say. But how to polish and finish a manuscript, that's something that you will have to have worked out before you apply.

And then the 35-word pitch is something you're going to do with your mentor, so don't worry about that. But what does a successful query letter to get into pitch wars look like and how on earth do you pare down your brilliant novel and explain it in one page? We'll talk about that, some tips and tricks. So first off, one part of the querying process or the creating a query letter, that process— one part of that, that I think is often overlooked, but is extremely important is that of selecting comp titles. Now, while it does say comp titles, you can actually look at this as if this has wider reach than that. So you could be talking about... you could be comparing your book to other books to TV shows, movies, historical time periods, sub genres, gothic horror iconic authors, etc. So this is going to be a scenario where you say, you know, "my book is this meets this", and drawing on titles that are similar to your book, both in content and hopefully in projected sales. So you are here offering your mentor or agents a glimpse into your savviness with this genre that you are writing in.

So we're going to talk about some do's and do not's when it comes to selecting a comp title. So thou shall, when selecting a comp title, pick something in your genre that is fairly recent for at least one of your comp titles. They don't both have to be very recent, but this just really demonstrates that you are an avid consumer of your genre.

You know what's selling. You know what's coming out. You've got your hand on the pulse of what is what the industry is looking for.

Make sure that you're targeting the same demographic that is represented in your book. So if you are writing a middle grade novel, then I would recommend that you comp your title to other middle grade titles or things that demographic would consume and enjoy. Try to compare your book to successful novels, TV shows, movies. Scroll through recent bestseller lists and try to find something that is hopefully comparable to how well your book is going to sell. So in essence pick comp titles that make your book sound interesting, relevant, and sellable.

So here are some positive examples. Let's go ahead and scroll through all of them, or have all of them appear so we can look at them. So you can pick a very popular title from your genre: "Young Elites" meets historical time period. That's an option. You could also say that this offers the darker allure of "City of Bones" (popular title) with a modern-day twist on a classic legend. In this case, this is a real book.

This the classic legend is arthurian allure with a lot of Southern black girl magic, and this sounds like a very intriguing combination of things that are popular, sellable, relevant, and unique to be combined in this way. So that is a great way of combining different titles or different concepts

together to explain what this agent or mentor is getting into when they read through your book. A book that came out recently, I believe last year, "Spin the Dawn" Project Runway meets Mulan. That would make me continue reading. I'd be very intrigued. Tell me more.

"What Stars are Made of" written by my good friend Sarah Allen, it was pitched as "Wonder" meets "Counting by Sevens," which are two popular and well received middle grade titles. And then, in the more adult genre, we've got this book is "Lovecraft" meets "The Bronte's" in Latin America.

So the reason that I think this works really well is these are titles or authors phenomenon, who are iconic and have cult followings, and it really gives us an idea of even just literary quality of the book we're going to be looking at, which, within this case is Mexican gothic.

That Lovecraft and the Bronte's are timeless and that you're kind of plugging into that phenomenon with your book, and you're setting it up against a unique cultural background that hasn't really been applied to "Lovecraft" or "The Bronte's." And I'm extremely excited about the potential that that has.

So, thou shalt nots, then. And again, these are not hard and fast rules, obviously there are always going to be exceptions, but if you're someone who maybe had never even heard of comp titles until five minutes ago, I would highly recommend that we start here with some basic rules of what to pick. Try hard not to compare your book, especially if they're for a younger audience, to things that you read in high school—for high school for English class.

You do want to demonstrate to mentors or agents that you are genre savvy, you know the trends, you know what's selling, and you have indeed read books since high school. It's one of the things that kind of drives me crazy is when I see books comp to things that teens don't read and it's for teens.

That can be a little problematic. Try not to throw completely different things together and say, "Doesn't that sound interesting?" because it may actually just sound really confusing.

So I'll show an example of that. Try not to pitch your book to be similar to other books that are not your genre or that are for your particular audience. And I would recommend that you don't compare your book to obscure or unsuccessful titles, because again, you're trying to demonstrate marketability.

So some negative examples: If you're writing a middle grade book and you say it is Stephen King for children, if I was a mentor I might sit here and go, "Not sure you should be writing for children." In any case, everyone has different opinions, of course.

But I might be wondering if you haven't—have you seen Stranger things? Have you seen Gravity Falls? Why are you writing this genre if you're not aware of what's being done successfully in that genre? Here's an idea of throwing too many ideas together: mermaids meet ninjas in a steampunk adventure set on Mars.

I'm not convinced you know what genre you're writing in, in this case. This book is sure to be the next Hunger Games. You know, I've got to admire the confidence, but it's probably not. It's probably not that. So what you're not trying to— This is more about ethos and not really about your ego as you're picking comp titles. You want to try to sell your book, but you don't want to oversell your book, because that doesn't actually make you look genre savvy.

If you're writing a book... you're pitching your book as something that will appeal to fans of "The Great Gatsby" in 1984. I might be sitting here wondering if you've read widely in your genre and if your idea of good books is kind of stuck in time or if you have more of an adaptive mindset and and a growth mindset when it comes to what literature can accomplish in a decade or after 20 years or after a dozen years. Do you have any sense of how literature changes and how readership changes? And It doesn't really bode well. This is not to say that if you come up with a bad set of comp titles, that you're out in the cold and you will not be picked. That's that's not necessarily true.

But you'll see here that where comp title one meets comp title two, this is going to be a first impressions moments for your mentor or agents. So to create what I would consider a successful formula for your query letter as you're applying or submitting to pitch wars or querying agents who requested material from you during pit mad, "Dear mentors or agents," and I highly recommend—no, I insist that you personalize all of these headers. In the case of pitch wars, because you are applying to four different mentors at once. It's probably not feasible for you to do anything other than "dear mentor" or "dear mentors."

But if you're querying an agent, always put their name and always personalize it. "Due to your interest in x and y," which signifies I've done my research, I've looked at what you represent. I've looked at what you write. I looked at your manuscript wish list and I picked out some keywords of things that you're interested in. And "I thought you might enjoy my"—try to insert some buzz words here, own voices, Korean inspired, you know, things like that—"pitch as..."

Here we go. First impressions, give them a glimpse into what they're getting themselves into with your comp titles.

And then try to sell your manuscript. Say some great things about it. Then go into a synopsis. This is going to be brief, a couple hundred words. And in this synopsis. This is different from your one page synopsis. And the one for your query letter? Don't spoil everything. You want it to be more like a mix between a synopsis and a pitch almost. You'll have to include your title in the next paragraph. Do include the word count. And if you're writing a standalone, you don't need to write this next part.

But if you are writing something that you're projecting will turn into a series, one little trick of the trade: please write it as a standalone but has series potential rather than saying, "This is book one in a trilogy" or whatnot. Talk about your experiences and then all the pleasantries and whatnot. So I would say that this is a working formula for you to get started. You'll definitely want people to look over your query letter as you are moving forward, and there are so many resources online to help you formulate a query letter. So, and that's not what this session is in particular about. But in order to have a successful —I was gonna say attempt, but that sounds so rude, "attempt at getting into pitch wars"—to begin the journey into pitch wars on the right foot here is something that I think would be helpful, this formula.

All right, let's talk about this dreaded one page synopsis. And just to be clear, this synopsis (when agents asked for a one page synopsis separate from your query letter) you do not hold back when it comes to spoilers. You will tell them everything: The twists and turns and how everything results. Because in your query letter, you set up a promise you know that I know how to write a compelling book.

And here you're showing it's not just the hook that's cool. I can actually follow through with what I have said. So I'm going to go through kind of a step-by-step guide of first start do this, then do this, then do this.

And there is a resource that I am pulling from, and if I am still awake and I haven't bored myself to sleep as an audience member currently, I will drop the link to the resources as I reach them in my presentation. So hopefully, if you look at the chat function, you will see the resource I am drawing from that I used to create my synopsis. So check the chat for that, and hopefully it is there.

So I'm going to go over this relatively quickly in order to get to pit mad, because I don't want to spend too much time on synopsis. But in essence, what you're going to do is start with an

opening image. Set the stage for your story. Introduce your protagonist. Give us some descriptive words.

Then give us an inciting incident. What is the catalyst? What happens that kind of shifts things for this protagonist, is making them leave the life that they have always known? Plot points. These will be turning points in in your story. What is kinda like the point of no return? What is a decision, a line that they're going to cross in which case the story is fully launched and they can't really go back to the way life was before? Then, introduce the main conflict, and other characters, the antagonist and whatnot.

Then, we get to the midpoint. This is another turning point. So this would be, again, a line that they cross where we can't go back, but this one's going to be even bigger than the first plot point.

And then winning seems imminent. So we've got this trajectory going on. And then we get to a dark moment of the soul, which leads to the climax. Tell us what scenes or how that leads up to what is this crescendo of the plot.

Then you'll tell us how everything resolves and give us a final image. Okay, so again, you can check out the resource that I used to look at this little more closely.

But a sample synopsis for the story that you're probably familiar with: A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. We've got Luke Skywalker. Here's a description of him and what his wants and desires are. And his turning point is meeting this guy named Ben who tells him all about this crazy conflict that's going on in the world. Now we're going to meet other cast members. We've got Han Solo and his hairy alien friend Chewbacca.

We meet Princess Leia. And we're crescendoing and going up and then we get our dark moment of the soul when Obi Wan Kenobi sacrifices himself. Spoilers. I'm so sorry. But this has been out for like 40 years. So hopefully you're okay with this. Then we're getting to the climax of trying to destroy the Death Star, and how that resolves and the final image of party time ceremony.

So hopefully that gives you an idea of how that works and how—does this really go into the side quests and the side stories? No, it does not. That is not what your synopsis is going to do.

You will focus on the main characters. So in this case, it's Luke Skywalker. And I don't even think Han Solo is named, even though he's such an iconic and huge part of Star Wars. He is

relegated to what? A low-life pilot. That is who he is in the synopsis, because he is a side character. And we don't have room to to talk about his internal struggle and things like that. So stick to the main story.

Right? So you've got your comp titles. You've got your query letter. You have a one page synopsis. You've polished your manuscript as best you can. Now it's time to pick a mentor. So in order to take advantage of pitch wars and set yourself up for success, here's some tips to submitting to the right people to give you the best chance of getting chosen.

I suggest that as soon as mentors are announced that year, start looking at them. And I don't mean just look at their manuscript wish list, which will be readily available on the pitch wars website. And I do definitely recommend you look at that and try to find keywords that apply to your book. So if in their manuscript wish list, they're sitting there going, "I would really love something witchy," And your book is witchy, then that might be a word you might you would use in your query letter.

But more than all of that, I would highly recommend—well, definitely do that part—but I would highly recommend that you follow mentors you're interested in on Twitter. So pitch wars, while it is more of an interpersonal thing between you and your mentor, a lot of it is also happening on Twitter. So a lot of the visibility that you're going to have, the momentum, all of that is going to be on Twitter. In fact, that's where they pretty much announce everything.

Side Story. I didn't even know that I was picked as a mentee because I didn't use my Twitter account. I had one. And so they tagged me, but I didn't ever use it. I didn't have it on my phone. So I actually had a friend messaged me on Facebook to tell me congratulations for something I didn't know had happened. So I found out that I was selected, not through Twitter, even though I have a Twitter account.

Try to use Twitter, at least during the pitch wars process and of course during the pit mad process. Please, please, please try to be a little more present on Twitter. In any case, as you're following the mentors on Twitter, many of them will engage on Twitter to give little hints and glimpses into things they're looking for. So they might send out a tweet saying, "Hey, if any of you are writing "Little Mermaid" meets "Downton Abbey," Those are my jam. Totally looking for that." So we can give you extra insights and glimpses into their personalities. Remember with pitch wars you are going to be working with this person for months and you don't want to just have shared interests.

Some compatibility would be great. And since there are dozens of mentors to choose from. It can help you to narrow it down to four, which is all you're allowed to query to, if you look at them.

Look at their personality online and try to gauge, "All right, I share interests with 15 of them, but only seven of them seem to be my kind of person" and just kind of narrow it down from there.

Okay. All right, now that we've started talking about Twitter, let's jump right into Pit mad. Now, I am not as well versed when it comes to pit mad because I did pitch wars, but I have gleaned a lot of information about this, because these two are highly connected and I have lots of friends who have participated in pit mad. So what is pit mad? It is a Twitter pitch party.

So, in essence, you will pitch your book on Twitter in 280 characters. And again, this needs to be a finished, polished, unpublished manuscript. And then agents will follow that hashtag #PitMad that day and like or favorite tweets for books that they're interested in looking at and perhaps representing. So if you get a like from an editor or an agent that means you will now go through the query process with them.

But you'll kind of jump the line a little bit because they've requested it from you. So this is a way to get agents to come to you. By the time you guys are watching this, the next pit mad party for this year will be December 3, so you do have time to strategize for that. So let's talk about one Twitter pitch party success story. This is Swati Teerdhala, and I'm picking her because she was my other mentor in pitch wars.

And she participated, not in pit mad, but in DV pits, which is more for diverse writers; but it's the same thing in terms of being a Twitter pitch party. And she wrote (it's a trilogy but the first book is) "The Tiger at Midnight." I adore it. If you like all things lush and vivid and Hindu mythology and Indian history, this book is definitely for you. But she was able to sign with Kristin Nelson. And if you are aware of the agent university, she's a big name. So Swati was able to sign with a very, very impressive agent by using a Twitter pitch party.

And I will drop the link to this interview that I'm about to talk about now. And this is an interview about her experience on DV pits, the Twitter pitch party.

So it will be between Swati and her agent, Kristin Nelson. And, again, I will drop the link to that in the chat if I am awake. If not, someone I don't know, yell at me.

So in the interview itself, here is what her agent said about what drew her eye and why she wanted to sign with this person after only seeing a tweet.

So to nail a Twitter pitch, find the magical combo of good writing a hook or concept and how to position your pitch. There's obviously not a lot of space here, because it's a pitch. It's 250 words, right? So what you say and how you say it matters a lot.

And then, as she says here, look, the comp titles made a huge difference. And in this case it was "Winners Curse" meets "Ember in the Ashes," which was very intriguing. So again, like seriously comp titles do a lot of legwork for you, so consider them very carefully.

And then you'll want to establish what makes your book unique and unexpected.

And whatnot. And try to have a little bit of your voice in the Twitter pitch. So this may sound like an extremely tall order, and it is.

There definitely is an art to this, but if you do it successfully, there are really great agents who are looking for something unique, something fresh that can be pitched successfully in just the matter of one tweet.

So some sample pitches to kind of give you an idea of what this could look like. Here's some titles you're probably familiar with: "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe." So if you were going to pitch this at a tweet you might say something like "when escaping World War II four children go to magical, tyrannical land through a wardrobe to fill a prophecy and save both worlds." Right? That's the story you know sounds super exciting and intriguing.

Now let's try "The Three Little Pigs." Brothers devoured by a killer known as the Big Bad Wolf, third pick fights for his life with a pile of bricks between him and death. So exciting.

Let's do "Alice in Wonderland." Girl abducted by rabbit from family picnic to fight a war in a magical dimension when put on trial for her life. Will she wake up? I got these pitches from an online source and, again, I will drop the link to that in the chat box, so you can see it for yourself.

But hopefully this is giving you an idea of what you should be aiming for to pitch your book and that pit mad is a really great opportunity to have agents come to you and speed up that querying process a little bit. Both pitch wars and pit mad or other Twitter pitch parties are online opportunities that will help you cut through the sludge pile that they are going through to get their attention a little bit faster.

Okay, so with all of this being said, are you guaranteed an agents if you are accepted into pitch wars? Or if you get a lot of engagements with your pit mad tweets? No, but pitch wars and pit mad—these are great ways to start practicing your querying skills and get some real-life industry experience.

You can learn and grow from this. if you didn't get any bites on pit mad, then that's an indication that we've got to spice things up a little bit. Let's rev things up. Let's get things going. Let's add some more sparkle and shine.

And if you don't get into pitch wars, then that means your book may not (or your query may not) be ready for agents, either. So there is some valuable feedback that you can get from participating in either of these experiences.

And so a bit of a story time. I suppose I can stop sharing now and make you look at me instead, and full screen. But my agent didn't actually participate in pitch wars itself. I did get an offer from a pitch wars agents or an agent who participated in pitch wars, but I was also cold querying agents at the same time. And the agent that I ended up with was someone I cold queried and said, "I've got this offer. Would you be interested in perhaps representing my book?" And so on and so forth. So basically, everyone's journey is a little bit different. And by calling pitch wars and pit mad an online opportunity to get an agent's attention, the measurement of success with that isn't merely did you end up with the agent of your dreams. Of course that is ideal. We all want that.

But there's more to it than that. It's more nuanced. And there's very important things that you can glean. We're all on our own separate writing journey.

And the road to success is going to look different for all of us. But I do think that by putting your best foot forward with either pitch wars or pit mad, you are going to start learning a lot more than you then you might if you were cold querying. Because the the turnaround time for feedback or engagement is so much faster with these platforms. So you will be able to learn and grow at a faster pace than you would if you were querying for an entire year, and we're slowly getting responses trickling back and realizing at the end of the year that you should revise your query letter. This way, after a after like a day, you'll have an idea of whether or not you know how to pitch your book.

Or after you've submitted it, in the matter of a month, if you got requests from mentors or if you didn't, this can give you an idea of whether or not you need to spruce things up a little bit. So no

matter what, I consider these a win-win situation, opportunities to start putting yourself out there and engaging with the writing community, and perhaps gaining some momentum launching your career or otherwise setting up some very important foundational work for you to be able to have a successful query run in the future.

So that was a lot of information, and I hope that you did get out of this presentation what you were hoping to get out of it.

I'm very much looking forward to engaging with you in the Q&A session. Hopefully I'm awake. Wake up, Madeleine, future self if I put myself to sleep. Hopefully you've been getting the links. And yeah, I look forward to engaging with you very soon. Thanks for listening to me ramble and talk about the wonderful experiences I've had with pitch wars, and I wish you all the very best in your journeys.