

The young and the published

Different routes led these teens to the same end: They're authors

By Doug Rutsch
BEE STAFF WRITER

"Absolutely not."
That's what Maneesh Sethi remembers being told when he first pitched his book idea, "Game Programming for Teens."

Then a freshman at Bella Vista High School in Fair Oaks, Sethi thought his perspective as a student would set the perfect tone for teens.

Undeterred, he wrote the first three chapters of the book and sent them to Andre LaMothe, game programmer and head of Premier Press, who green-lighted

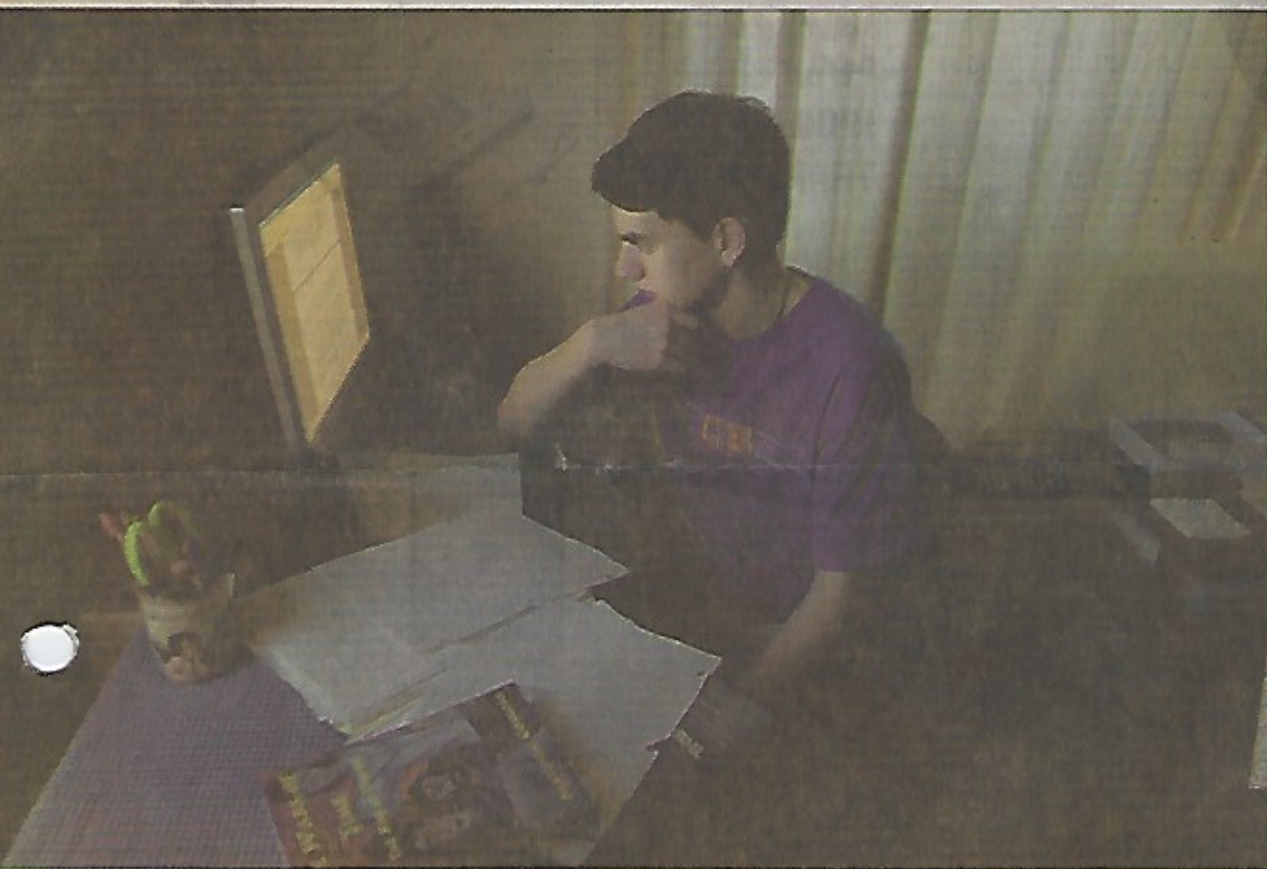
the project. Soon, Sethi had a deadline to finish his first book before he finished his first year of high school.

Now, after just nine months on the market, "Game Programming for Teens" has become one of most successful books for Premier Press (now called Course PTR), selling more than 18,000 copies in a market in which 10,000 is considered a success. Sethi, who plans to use the money - about \$1.50 per book sold - to fund his education at Stanford, also has written "Web Design for Teens" and is in the

process of writing "How To Succeed as a Lazy Student."

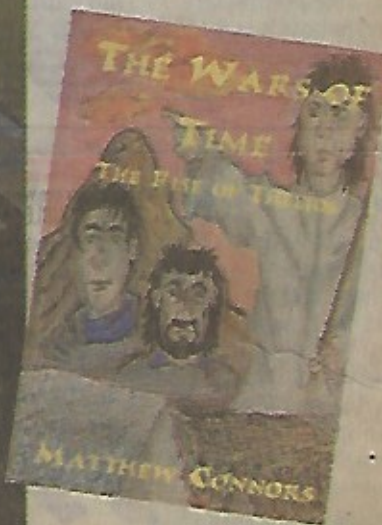
Nowadays, he has a contract in hand before he writes a book and is in a position to turn down suggested book ideas.

Establishing a career is not as easy for young poets and novelists, who struggle to keep up with older, professional writers - many of whom are struggling themselves. Sethi, now 17, writes for a niche market, and his age even works to his advantage. Now that he's proved himself as a capable writer, it's easier for
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Matthew Connors, 16, left, works on the sequel to his first book, "The Wars of Time: The Rise of Thelios."

Sacramento Bee/Lezlie Sterling



Published: Teen market is expanding

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him to sell an idea for a teen market.

Many young writers trying to prove themselves are flocking to publications that cater to their work. Teen Ink, a book series and nationally distributed monthly magazine with a readership of more than 300,000, received 54,000 submissions last year, according to editor Kate Dunlop Seamans. She says submissions include poetry, music reviews and nonfiction.

Sethi beat the odds and got a publishing contract but doesn't consider that unusual. His advice to other young writers is more practical than mystical.

"You have to sit down and actually write something," he said. "Once you've written something, go to publishers' Web sites; they all have links to submit something. It's not that hard."

On top of the sales figures for "Game Programming for Teens," Sethi has parlayed the book's success into a brief run on "TechTV," although his role was cut after just two episodes when the show moved from San Jose to Los Angeles.

And it's no surprise that now, Sethi's age makes him "the ideal author for the ever-expanding teen market," according to Heather Hurley of Course PTR.

"It's amazing to find someone his age who is able to so successfully balance academics

"Never give up; keep at it. Once you're finished, you have a sense of completion – that's true for everything, not just writing a book."

Matthew Connors

16-year-old writer

with the demands of writing and marketing books," she said.

But for Sethi, brushes with minor celebrity status are a mere distraction – he cares more about finding a way out of homework. Book contract or no, he's still a high school senior.

Of course, if publishing companies won't work with young writers, teens can do the publishing themselves. That's the route Matthew Connors, a 16-year-old sophomore at Christian Brothers, took to print his fantasy novel, "The Wars of Time: The Rise of Thelios." The book, which he started writing in eighth grade, creates a world that meshes tones from the "Lord of the Rings" books and "WarCraft," a computer game.

But unlike Sethi's quick success, Connors struggled to get published. After rejections

from several publishing firms, he eventually contacted Trafford Publishing, a pay-for-printing company that charges about \$1,000 for an initial printing.

He received the first copies of his book in December – and without a distributor, the only way for him to sell copies is through word of mouth.

Connors said he was "amazed" he finished the book amid school responsibilities. He credited his parents with keeping him motivated. Like Sethi, he said that simple determination was the biggest key to writing a novel that checks in thick at 469 pages.

"Never give up; keep at it," he said. "Once you're finished, you have a sense of completion – that's true for everything, not just writing a book."

Connors hopes his book serves as a launching pad for his career. "The Rise of Thelios" is the first of a trilogy, and Connors says he is more than 100 pages into the sequel, which he hopes to finish before the end of the school year. Although the publication of his first book was not as glamorous as Sethi's, he's prepared to keep writing.

"I have time to write more stuff," he said. "Even if this book doesn't do well, I have a whole lifetime ahead of me."

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Maneesh Sethi, right, wrote "Game Programming for Teens," which has sold 18,000 copies and has given the 17-year-old a strong foothold as an author.

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