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Mark Binder works on his online novel, The Brothers Schlemiel, from his home in Providence, R.I.

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# Online novelist has lesson for Stephen King: Don't threaten the readers

2/12/2001  
By [Patricia Resende](#)

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Sitting in a local coffee shop not far from his home on the east side of Providence, **Mark Binder** unpacks his backpack, opens his laptop and begins cranking away at his electronic novel.

**Binder**, 38, continues doing what Steven King recently failed at; he's sending chapters of his soon-to-be-published book to nearly 200 paying subscribers. **Binder** said he was sending e-mailed versions of his novel nearly six weeks before King started.

**Binder**, a Newton native who moved to Providence after college, said he is not expecting to make \$400,000 as King did with one book. But he does expect to keep his subscribers enthralled with his book and take advantage of the free technology of sending it by e-mail.

"What I found is there is a method for delivering material through the Web that is incredibly efficient," **Binder** said. "However, to get people to pay for that material when they are accustomed to getting things for

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free (is difficult)."

Subscribers to his book pay a flat, one-time fee for the installments and do not have to pay to continue to receive the installments. **Binder** sends one e-mail per week that equals about three pages of double-spaced text or 1,000 words.

Initially **Binder** was charging \$10 for a year subscription but one of his readers said she would be willing to pay up to \$25 for a subscription, so **Binder** upped the price.

His paying audience of acquaintances, friends, and random browsers can read archived chapters of the book from the Web site.

Titled The Brothers Schlemiel, the book reaches a niche audience, half of whom are women. The story is about the lives of identical twin brothers from before their birth to barmitzvah.

**Binder** admits that promoting, **marketing**, and getting subscribers has been no walk in the park, but said he'll continue as long as he has readers who leave their own worlds to enter his characters' lives.

He also has other work to fall back on. He teaches aikido, a Japanese martial art, is a professional storyteller and a trained actor, and writes for various magazines. **Binder** has already published anti-diet books and a book on Web design.

People have criticized the idea of e-books or e-mailed chapters of books, especially after King stopped.

But **Binder** said King's problem was the way he asked for payment.

King would allow users to download the book three installments at a time for free. After that, users would then have to visit his Web site to pay for the next installment. According to **Binder**, King warned readers he would stop sending e-mailed versions of his book if they did not pay after the first installment. **Binder**, too, was a subscriber.

"It didn't work because he set himself up for failure," **Binder** said. "He said 'pay me or I'm going to stop'."

"Threatening people that you are going to stop (sending installments) if they don't pay you, it just sounds too greedy."

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