

MARCH 2008 SPECIAL TOPICS FOR SIMBA BOOK PUBLISHING REPORT

JAMES FREY: A CASE STUDY IN AUTHOR FRAUD

Draft 1

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This report contains:

Narrative

SAMPLE

Each month for more than eight years, we produced reports for Simba Information's Book Publishing Report until the trade publishing division of MarketResearch.com was closed and BPR ceased publication at the end of 2013. This report was submitted as a "special topic" in March 2008, after author James Frye, whose *A Million Little Pieces* shot to the top of the lists after being selected for the Oprah Book Club, had to admit that he plagiarized much of the book. The report contrasts Frye's fall with the pattern of several other long-running books at the time.

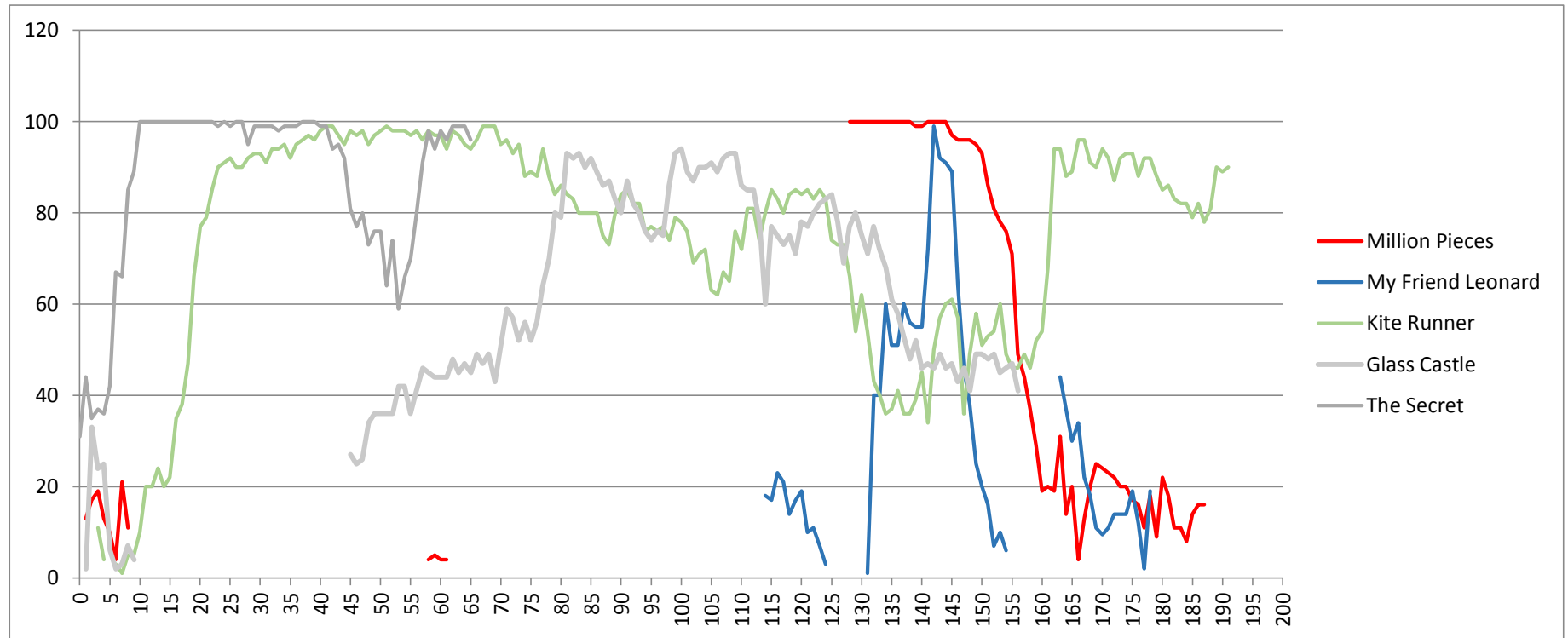
The report was designed to meet the editorial requirements of Simba Information. It demonstrates the types and depth of information that can be extracted from the bestseller database that we have maintained since late summer 2001. The chart was created in Excel from data obtained using our own web-based report generator. The chart has been colorized and the report converted to landscape orientation for greater clarity in this sample.

This is a sample for demonstration purposes only. No portion of the content may be published in any form.

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Posted on our website at
[www.sjassociates.com/docs/
SAMPLE_Case_Study_Millions_Pieces.pdf](http://www.sjassociates.com/docs/SAMPLE_Case_Study_Millions_Pieces.pdf)

Does it really matter when an author defrauds his audience and publisher? Charges of plagiarism or memoirs that contain more fabrication than reality continue to surface. It would be good to remind ourselves that it does matter. Let's look back at the infamous case of James Frey and *A Million Little Pieces*.



Like many books, Frey's memoir began in hardcover. It first appeared on New York Times for sales reported the week ending April 20, 2003. It ran for 9 weeks, achieving rankings between 16 and 32. It appeared on USA one week. (This appears as the short red line at the left of the chart—the horizontal axis is a timeline of number of weeks).

As was typical at the time, but becoming less rigid each year now, a paper reprint was published a year later. It appeared on New York Times for 6 weeks from late May through early August 2004, at rankings from 25 to 34 (the very short line around the 60 mark on the timeline).

More than a year passed. Then, in September 2005, Frey's book was selected for the Oprah Book Club. The paper Oprah edition of the book debuted at Nr. 1 on all three lists we track (New York Times, USA Today, and Publishers Weekly). It remained at #1 on NYT and PW for 16 weeks, a full week after the January 8 revelation on the Smoking Gun website that Frey had fabricated much of his heart-wrenching story. (We align our reports with the sales report dates. The actual publication on NYT is two weeks later.)

As word of the story got out, sales began to fall—not as dramatically as you might expect. In fact, the hardcover edition surfaced on NYT for seven weeks as the story unfolded. However, the downturn was unsalvageable and the book quickly declined on the lists through February and March. By early-April 2006 (sales reports) it was off PW and by the end of the month was off USA. It briefly reappeared at the bottom of USA five times over eight weeks from late May through mid-July. It spasmodically declined on NYT until it made its final appearance there the week of sales ending December 3, 2006 (the list published December 17).

The impact of the revelation of the fraud is even more obvious in Frey's second bestseller, *My Friend Leonard*. The hardcover edition started a meteoric rise, which peaked the very week of the Smoking Gun report. From there it descended more precipitously than did *Pieces* itself. Even so, a paper reprint did hit the lists in June 2006, starting higher in consolidated ranking than *Pieces*, but then descending rapidly, disappearing after 17 weeks.

Despite the fraud, *Pieces* still reportedly sold 4.5-million copies, and even *My Friend Leonard* would easily qualify as a success compared to the average bestseller. But could they both have gone on to even more stellar figures? Compare their rapid decline in the chart to several other books.

The Kite Runner (Khaled Hosseini, Riverhead) and *The Glass Castle* (Jeannette Walls, Scriber) represent fiction and nonfiction works that span a similar time period. *Glass Castle* also started in hardcover for a short time, then reappeared a year later in paper, where it began a long bell curve arc to its peak and then down. *The Kite Runner* has enjoyed a remarkably long 199 weeks on the lists since May 2004, rising steadily to a peak, then settling back very slowly before a revival toward the end of 2007 before the movie based on the book was released in December.

Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret* (Beyond Words) has "only" been on the lists 66 weeks, but has shown remarkable staying power. It rose rapidly, where it stayed on the top for nearly 30 weeks, then started to decline before enjoying a rebound at the end of 2007 (unlike *Pieces*, which never recovered once it started its downward slide). Other examples of longevity about—especially for nonfiction—so, it does seem that had *A Million Little Pieces* not been fraudulent, it could have enjoyed a significantly longer life and given James Frey a spot among the relatively small club of repeat bestselling nonfiction authors.