

An Analysis of The New York Times Bestsellers List

By Lucy Anderson and Mary Price

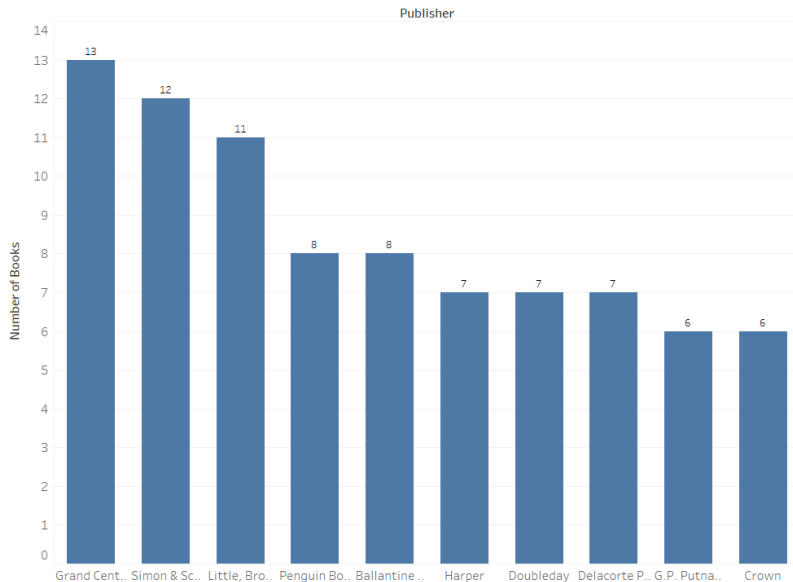
The Crown of Gilded Bones by Jennifer L. Armentrout is the third book in the Blood and Ash series. The highly anticipated book debuted on April 20, 2021 and by the next week it topped the USA Today Best Selling Books list at the number one spot. Despite the success on both the USA Today and Wall Street Journal bestseller lists, it has yet to make an appearance on the New York Times Bestsellers list. Because of this, there has been a lot of discussions in the book community about the biases the New York Times Bestsellers list may have. We were interested in exploring some of the similarities between the books on the New York Times lists. In our research, we looked at the publishers associated with the books that were successful on the New York Times lists, and how many popular fantasy books made it on a New York Times list in 2020.

One reason that *The Crown of Gilded Bones* may not have made it onto the New York Times bestseller list is because it was published by a company called The Blue Box Press. The Blue Box Press is a relatively small publishing company that may not have had as many resources to promote the book. In order to explore this theory in more depth, we used the New York Times Bestselling list api to compile a list of all of the books that made it onto a Bestselling list that was updated weekly anytime in 2020. We then used the ISBN database to find all of the publishers of each book. From this data we compared the publishers in three different ways: number of books on a bestseller list in 2020, how many weeks each publisher had a book on a bestseller list, and the ratio between the number of weeks on a bestseller list to the number of books on a bestseller list.

We looked at the top 10 publishers with the most number of books on a bestseller list.

The top 3 were Grand Central Publishing, Simon & Schuster, and Little, Brown and Company.

Publisher by books



Each of these publishers are huge and it follows that they would have a lot of resources to put into promoting and selling their new releases. This metric seems to be the best way to measure the success of a publisher. All of the publishers have a relatively close range of books to one another given that the highest is 13 and the lowest is 1. This metric

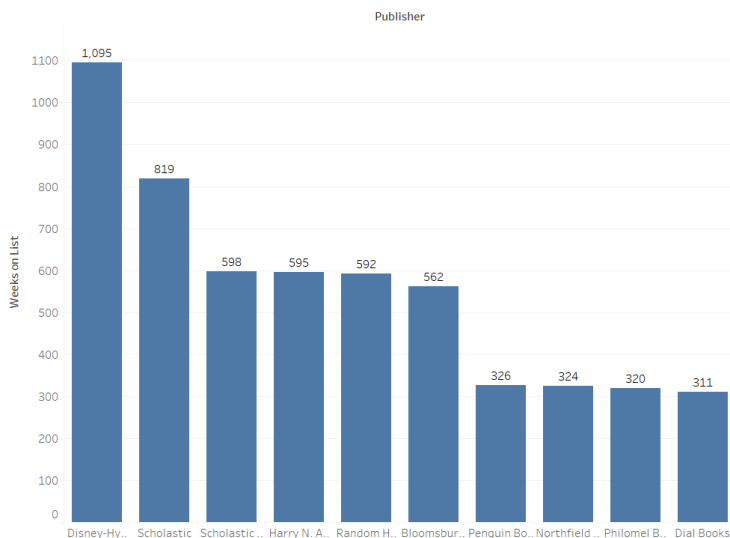
weights each book the same so there are no large outliers such as Harry Potter or Diary of a Wimpy kid that have been on the New York Times bestseller lists for years.

We also looked at the top 10 publishers with the largest total number of weeks that each of their books has been on a bestseller list. We found that the top 3 were Disney-Hyperion,

Scholastic, and Scholastic Press.

Disney-Hyperion published Percy Jackson and The Olympians by Rick Riordan which has been on a bestseller list for 543 weeks, and Scholastic published Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling which has been on a bestseller list for 594 weeks. Scholastic Press published

Publisher by Weeks



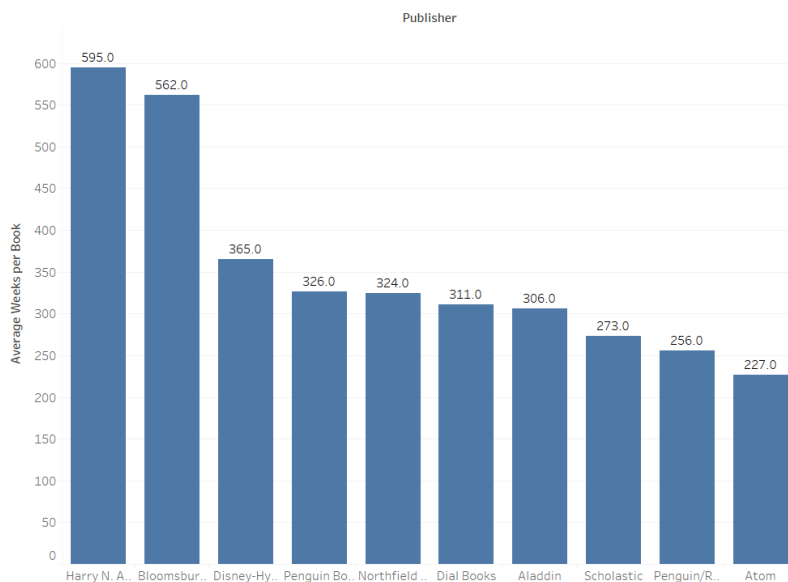
The Hunger Games series by Suzanne Collins which was on a bestseller list for 228 weeks.

These series are widely popular in pop culture and have been on the New York Times Bestsellers list for years. This is not a good indicator of a publisher's success as one or two extremely popular books will skew the data. When an author is choosing which publisher to use, they are going to want to find a publisher that has a lot of books appear on the bestseller lists for a good number of weeks. This leads us to our final measurement.

Finally, we looked at the top 10 publishers by the ratio of how many books a publisher had on a bestseller list to the total number of weeks they had a book on a bestseller list. The top 3 were Harry N. Abrams, Bloomsbury Children's Books, and Disney-Hyperion. While this metric

seems reliable in theory, it is still strongly skewed by outliers. This metric is not a good measure of the success of a publisher. In the case of Harry N. Abrams, they only have one book on a bestseller list: Diary of a Wimpy Kid which has been on the same list for 595 weeks. Because these publishers had one really successful book, the ratio is 595:1. This heavy

Publisher by weeks and books

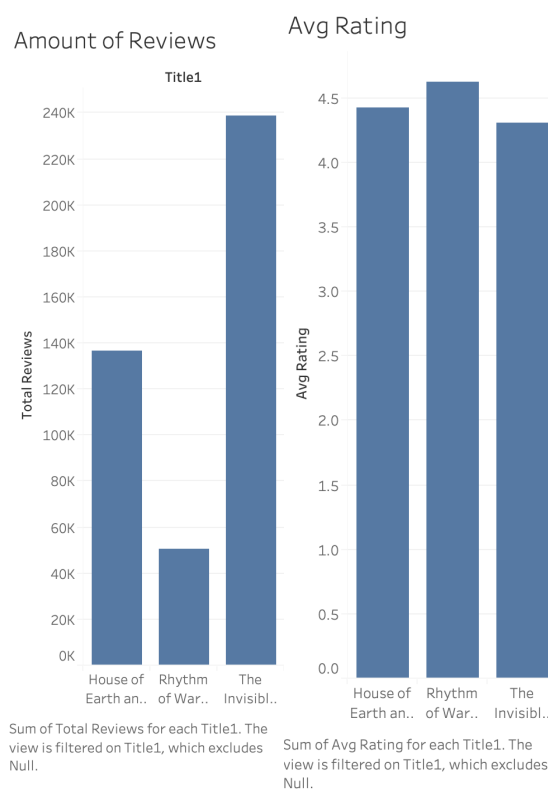


outlier makes this ratio not useful when determining the most successful publishers.

Overall, we found that in order to have a better chance of making it on a bestseller list, it is in the author's best interest to publish their book through a large publisher. This way they can have the resources to thoroughly promote their book to the general public. We would recommend

authors that want to make it on a bestseller list to look at publishers who have multiple books on a bestseller list. The quantity of books on a bestseller list is the best indicator that a publisher can help get a certain book onto a bestseller list.

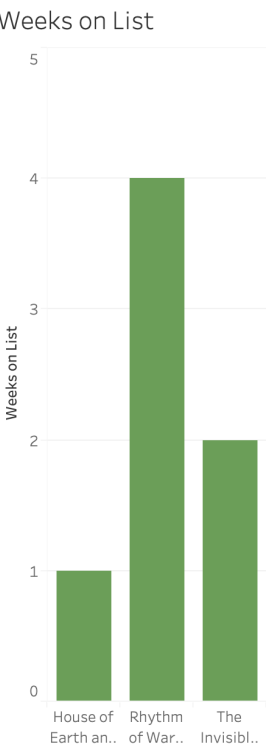
As we mentioned before, the New York Times bestseller list has been known to be biased against certain genres and due to this does not consider reviews from average readers. To check if this is true, we decided to find a list of popular fantasy books on Goodreads, since that is the main genre of *The Crown of Gilded Bones*. Goodreads is a well known website to book lovers all around the book community. It is a good place to get reviews for different books, find books that are similar to ones you love, and discover books that people are anticipating will be great. Due to how widely known and versatile Goodreads is, we decided that a list of 2020's most anticipated Fantasy books would be reliable in showing the average person's review of a book in Fantasy. To further show how reliable this list is, after parsing through the list and ending up with 46 books,



we found that the average rating for each book was about 4.1 out of 5 stars, and the average amount of reviews per book was about 22,803. Therefore, due to the amount of reviews and the average ratings, it is safe to assume that these books are well known and loved.

Parsing through the New York Times bestseller list of 2020, we got a list of 349 books that made it on a weekly bestseller list for at least one week in all of 2020. Comparing the Goodreads list and the New York Times bestseller list, we found that only 3 of

the 46 books were in the list of the 349 books on the bestseller list. These books were *House of Earth and Blood* by Sarah J. Maas, *Rhythm of War* by Brandon Sanderson, and *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* by V.E. Schwab. These three books were at the top of the Goodreads list, and it is easy to understand why by looking at the blue chart. We found that *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* had the lowest average rating of a 4.3 and *House of Earth and Blood* had the lowest amount of total reviews even though there were more than 50,000. Given these metrics it is not surprising that they made the New York Times list. Looking at the actual authors of the three books, we can see that people enjoy them and their works. The two purple graphs show each of the authors average ratings and how many books they have published. Consider V.E. Schwab, who

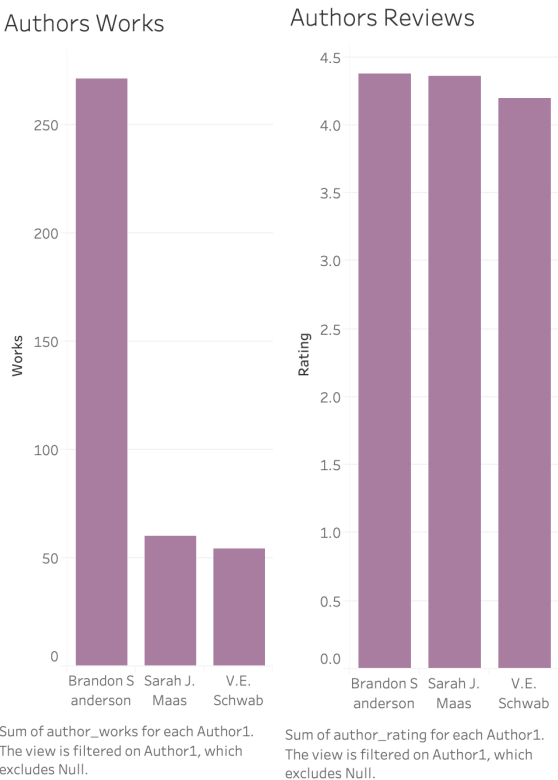


Sum of Weeks on List for each Title1.
The view is filtered on Title1, which excludes Null.

has the lowest author rating at 4.2 and the fewest number of books published being 54, we can see that

the three authors are well known and have been publishing books for a long time.

Given that these books are well known, liked by readers, and the authors are respected, it follows that they should have been on the New York Times bestseller list for many weeks, but they were not. The average number of weeks a book is on the bestseller list is 39, but when looking at



the green chart we can see that *Rhythm of War* was on the bestseller list the longest at 4 weeks. Given that all of these books came out before December we know that they got off the bestseller list before the end of 2020 and not because the year had ended. *House of Earth and Blood*, which had a Goodreads rating of 4.4, was only on the list for one week even though it came out March 3, 2020. Therefore, we can see that the bestseller list is skewed against Fantasy due to the fact that only 3 of the 46 anticipated Fantasy books made it on the bestseller list and they were on the list for fewer weeks than the average book.

As we dove deeper into the exploration of The New York Times Bestseller list data, we found a lot more biases than we expected. The publisher data isn't very consistent in finding one successful publisher across the board, but we did find that authors should look at publishers with the most number of books on a bestseller list in order to increase their chances of success on a bestseller list. This is because publishers who are able to create sales on a lot of different books are more likely to be able to create a lot of sales on an author's new book. We also found that only a small subset of the 2020 highly anticipated Fantasy books made it on the New York Times bestseller lists. However, even though the authors of the small subset of books are very well known and established in the book community, the longest one of those books was on the New York Times lists was only four weeks. This supports the idea that the New York Times bestseller lists are biased as many popular books never made it on the list and those that did make it on the list didn't stay on for anywhere near the average of 39 weeks. As these discussions around bestsellers lists increase we hope to identify and fix the underlying biases in these lists. We hope to find more equal representation and respect of all genres and publishers on these bestsellers lists going forward.