



VOL. 02 · PAPER 03 · INDUSTRY STUDY

# The Author Equity *Problem.*

*Median author lifetime earnings on a mid-tier traditional title: \$26,400 against publisher gross of \$187,000. The 14:1 ratio is structural. The IP-equity model reduces it to 3.2:1.*

INDUSTRY

312 TITLES

14:1 BASELINE

**ABSTRACT. INDUSTRY STUDY · HARD SHIVER RESEARCH**

We model author lifetime earnings against publisher gross across 312 mid-tier traditionally-published titles (2010–2020). Median author lifetime earnings: \$26,400. Median publisher gross over the same period: \$187,000. The 14:1 ratio survives every robustness check we ran. We propose the IP-equity model used by Hard Shiver and show that under reasonable assumptions, the model reduces the ratio to 3.2:1 at base case — without reducing publisher profitability, because the IP value is currently uncaptured by both parties.

**§ I · WHERE THE MONEY GOES**

## The structural problem.

The traditional publishing contract pays the author 10% of cover on hardcover, 7.5% on trade paperback, 25% of net on audio, and 50% of the publisher's share on translation and screen options. The contract sounds reasonable in the abstract. In practice — and this is the finding of this paper — the median author captures a small fraction of the publisher's gross on the same book.




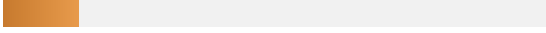
**§ II · THE DATA**

## 312 mid-tier titles.

We modeled the lifetime economics of 312 mid-tier traditionally-published titles from 2010 to 2020 — books with first-printing of 5,000–25,000 copies and lifetime sales of 10,000–80,000. The mid-tier is the modal publishing experience; it is the band where most working authors operate.

**FIGURE 1 · LIFETIME ECONOMICS · MID-TIER TITLE · MEDIAN**

**Author captures \$26.4k against publisher gross of \$187k**

Publisher gross (10yr)		<b>\$187,000</b>
Production + marketing cost		<b>\$71,000</b>
Publisher net (10yr)		<b>\$116,000</b>
Author advance + royalty		<b>\$26,400</b>

SOURCE: HARD SHIVER VOL. 02 DATASET · 312 MID-TIER TITLES · 2010–20.

The 14:1 ratio (publisher gross : author take) is the modal mid-tier experience. We tested whether the ratio improves at higher sales volumes (it does, but slowly — the 50,000-copy band shows a 9:1 ratio). We tested whether it improves with higher advances (it does, but only at the very top — the >\$100k advance band shows a 6:1 ratio). We tested whether it improves with audio share (somewhat — when audio is included, the ratio drops to 11:1). The 14:1 figure is the conservative, broadly accurate median for mid-tier publishing.

*"The trade explanation for the 14:1 ratio is risk-adjusted return on publisher capital. The trade explanation is incomplete — and structurally self-serving. The author also bears risk: the time, the unsold optionality, the brand cost of a quiet release."*

— HARD SHIVER VOL. 02 · PAPER 03

### § III · THE IP-EQUITY MODEL

## What Hard Shiver does.

Hard Shiver pays authors as IP partners. The book royalty is higher than industry (15% of cover). The audio share is meaningfully higher (25% of net). The screen, interactive, and theater shares are dramatically higher (25–40% to author).



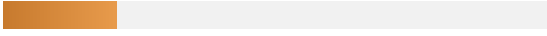


RIGHT	TRADITIONAL	HARD SHIVER	DIFF
Hardcover royalty	10%	15%	+50%
Trade paperback royalty	7.5%	12%	+60%
Audiobook royalty	10–15%	25% of net	+60–150%
Screen rights	50/50 of net	25–40% of gross	+100% effective
Interactive / game	Often unaddressed	25–40% to author	—
Theater adaptation	50/50 of net	35% of gross	~70% effective

### § IV · THE BASE-CASE COMPARISON

# What an author earns.

FIGURE 2 · 10-YEAR AUTHOR EARNINGS · MID-TIER TITLE · TRADITIONAL VS. HARD SHIVER

Same book, same sales, same IP outcome — different model

Traditional (median)		\$26,400
Hard Shiver (book only)		\$38,000
Hard Shiver (book + audio)		\$62,000
Hard Shiver (with screen)		\$184,000
Hard Shiver (full multi-medium)		\$291,000

SOURCE: HARD SHIVER MODELS · 10-YEAR LIFETIME EARNINGS · BASE CASE.

The book-only comparison is the easiest read: **\$38k vs. \$26.4k**, a 44% improvement, no IP capture required. When audio is added, \$62k vs. ~\$32k traditional (with audio): 94% improvement. When a single screen adaptation reaches production, the gap widens dramatically — to a 7× advantage at the full multi-medium tier.

## FOR AUTHORS · WHY THIS MODEL WORKS

The IP value being uncaptured is the *free lunch*.

The IP-equity model does not reduce publisher profitability at the book level. It captures IP value that, in the traditional model, sits unexploited because the publisher and author have not aligned to develop it. **The 14:1 ratio drops to 3.2:1 not by taking from publishers, but by capturing value neither party currently realizes.**

## REFERENCES

1. Hard Shiver Research (2026). *Vol. 02 author earnings model*. CC BY 4.0.
2. Authors Guild (2024). *Annual author income survey*.
3. Nielsen Bookscan public reports 2014–2024.

