

# Novelists' Ink

*The official newsletter of Novelists, Inc. — a professional organization for writers of popular fiction*

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## Can Familiarity Breed Content?

### Authors and the Continuing Series Character

By JUDITH BLACKWELL MYERS

*"As a reader, I've always loved series books best—books that present characters who are so alive, one book cannot hold them or say all that has to be said of them."*

**I**n those words, science fiction author Lois McMaster Bujold gives voice to the strong affection which many readers feel for series fiction, an affection which translates into a considerable market demand. From Sherlock Holmes to Spenser, from Horatio Hornblower to Luke Skywalker, limited and open-ended series continue to generate a large and loyal following. "Readers get interested in good characters," reasons Anne McCaffrey (creator of half a dozen successful series), "and want to read more about them, past, present, and future. They relate in some way to the character and can't bear to give him or her up, or the world which they inhabit."

But what of the author who generates such works? Is the creation of a successful series character the key to a happy and lucrative writing future, or is it destined to become a golden ball and chain? What are the liberations and limitations of "going steady" with your principal fictional creation?

To find out, I surveyed a number of Novelists, Inc. members who have written series novels in such fields as mystery, science fiction, romantic suspense, and fantasy.

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Thirty percent of the respondents publish series fiction exclusively; of the remaining seventy percent, most divide their efforts between single title and series work, while a few have made only isolated forays into non-series fiction. I posed a number of practical and philosophical questions to them regarding series work and their attitudes toward it. Here is a sampling of their replies.

#### Did you originally plan to write a series?

**Jean Auel:** "I did not plan a series. I actually started out to do a short story—that was a million or so words ago! However, I knew it would be a series before I finished the first book. The 'short story' led me to do some research; the research fired my imagination, and the wealth of material made me decide to write a novel. The first draft turned out to be more than 450,000 words and fell into six parts. On rewriting, I realized each of these six parts was a novel in itself. I have used that rough draft as the outline for the series."

**Diane Mott Davidson:** "I'm doing a series because that's a popular option within the mystery genre. Once the first half of *Catering To Nobody*, the first in the Goldy the Caterer series, was done, I'd had ideas for several more, and couldn't wait to start them."

**Patricia Gardner Evans:** "What has become a series protagonist (character Quinn Eisley) was never intended to be one. The character simply took on a life of his own, something which I had heard other writers say happened, but had never really believed until it happened to me. He was actually supposed to be a thoroughly unlikable jerk, my petty revenge against a thoroughly unlikable jerk from my first profession, but even in

*The strong affection many readers feel for series fiction translates into a considerable market demand.*

— **Lois McMaster Bujold**

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*Letters to the Editor is the most important column in our newsletter, since it is the monthly forum in which we can all share our views and express our opinions. Anonymous letters will never be published in NINK. Upon the author's request, signed letters may be published as "Name Withheld." In the interest of fairness and in the belief that more can be accomplished by writers and publishers talking with one another rather than about each other, when a letter addresses the policies of a particular publisher, the house in question may be invited to respond in the same issue. Letters may be edited for length or NINK style.*

### Books Needed

If you'd like to donate your foreign editions to a library that needs them, send your books to these three libraries:  
1) Chicago Public Library, Merle Jacob, 400 S. State St., Chicago IL 60605. They are looking for Polish, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Korean, or any other language people want to donate.

2) Cicero Public Library, Jan Mather, 5225 W. Cermak, Cicero IL 60650. Looking for Polish or Spanish editions, 708-652-8084.

3) Johnson County Library, PO Box 2901, Shawnee Mission KS 66201 ATTN: Mary Anne Hile, Collection Coordinator. Looking for Spanish editions.

— Bertrice Small

## POINT/COUNTERPOINT

*Each month features a new POINT. Agreements and disagreements—the Counterpoint—will be published two months later to allow everyone time to respond. POINTs are always published anonymously to allow members to bring up controversial issues related to the writing industry without concern. Send the POINT you want to bring up for discussion and your response to this month's POINT to the editor.*

### POINT:

I am delighted to be a member of an organization that includes so many high-achieving writers such as those interviewed by Catherine Coulter in last month's article "My First Time: An Anecdotal History of Authors' First Time Hitting the New York Times Bestseller List." Their well-deserved bestsellerdom lifts us all, and we appropriately celebrate the prestige of their bestseller status. At the same time, of course, our celebration reflects our understanding of the importance of the hefty superstar bottom-line demanded by publishers in the current "winner take all" business climate, and I perceive that we as a group have heavily bought into the industry's definition of

success in that our "hitting the list" (NY Times, USA Today, etc.). Although it would be foolish to ignore sales figures, can we as a group begin to put into circulation definitions of success that have more latitude than the vertical goal of "hitting the list" and whose measures aren't skewed so heavily toward romance writers? Can we begin to imagine successful writing careers that may never produce a NYTBS? Most (if not all) of you will say that one's definition of one's own success is ultimately a personal matter and I would agree, but I am questioning here precisely our public definitions and discussions. Can our public discussions, in turn, help shift the industry practices that have created the perceptions of polarization between the "haves" (the rich bestsellers) and the "have-nots" (the poor also-rans)? The dread term "midlist writer" is surely too stigmatized to be useful in our discussions. Nevertheless, can we help recreate the perception, both inside and outside our organization, that a respectable selling ground exists for professional writers who are not NYTBS's?

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# POINT/COUNTERPOINT

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## COUNTERPOINTS:

I read the September "Point/Counterpoint" stating that a professor of psychiatry had indicated "writers are 10-20 times more likely than others to suffer manic-depressive [bi-polar] or depressive illness." At first, this information depressed me. Then, I laughed.

— Kasey Michaels

Re: the contention that writers are 10-20 times more likely to suffer from manic-depressive or depressive illness. Why should this be a bad thing? Clinical depression runs rampant in my husband's family, and both my children inherited it. I have felt blessed that they were diagnosed early and did not have to suffer their entire lives as generations before them had suffered.

I was equally happy that I, myself, had been spared this awful disease, at least until I heard from my younger daughter a few months ago. She is currently studying drama at New York University (both my children are creative types, the other one being an artist, giving support to the theory that depressives also tend to be creative). One of her professors had assigned her to do a report on an article linking depression to creativity. After doing the research on all the many great writers and actors who had suffered from this disease, she informed me that she is *grateful* to have been afflicted. Without depression, she believes, she would never have experienced the depths of emotion that she now must tap as an actor. And with the medication that has provided treatment and relief only in her lifetime, she is doubly blessed in that she will not have to endure the disease—and possibly die an untimely death as a result as so many famous people before her have done—but she will still have ability to draw on what her illness has taught her.

At last year's Novelists, Inc. conference, I learned that many writers I know—sometimes I think at least half of them—are on Prozac or its equivalent. Instead of pitying them their suffering, I now am slightly envious, and I can't help wondering if my "normalcy" is the real handicap. Could that be the reason I haven't really "broken out" yet? Could my writing lack a certain depth because I've never known the black abyss of depression?

On a brighter note, the University of Pennsylvania is doing research to find the gene that causes depression as a preliminary step toward finding a cure. Since they are the ones who isolated the gene that causes high cholesterol, I have high hopes that perhaps my grandchildren will be inoculated at birth. Or would we then be stifling the next Hemingway or Lincoln or Virginia Woolf? Perhaps a true cure isn't the answer after all.

— Victoria Thompson

The author of the September "Point/Counterpoint" is fed up with "questionable-to-lousy theories" that link writers with manic-depressive and depressive illnesses.

Unfortunately, the author hasn't done the homework necessary to justify this stance except as an outburst of emotion. Emotional resistance to science, while sometimes understandable, is like attacking school teachers for teaching evolution; and a horde of such attackers still exist, *Inherit the Wind* notwithstanding. If the article that disturbed the author didn't make certain points clear, we should blame the reporter rather than the scientist.

The scientist in question, Kay Redfield Jamison, has written a marvelous book that I highly recommend to anyone interested in the creative process: *Touched with Fire*. Any book that can send me scurrying off to borrow my son-the-history-major's copy of Dante's *Inferno* has performed a feat akin to magic. Professor Jamison answers all the "Point/Counterpoint" concerns about the methodology used to determine that authors, along with musicians, poets, and artists, suffer unusually high rates of mood disorders. The book isn't about one "questionable-to-lousy" study. Instead, it reviews dozens of studies that all reach the same conclusion, and there are 81 pages of footnotes and references. Jamison then leaps beyond clinical studies to the words of writers and poets themselves—far more chilling and convincing than any statistics.

We ignore at our own peril research that illuminates the writer's condition, even if it affects only a minority of writers. Manic-depression, in particular, can be fatal if untreated. People without mood disorders almost never commit suicide, yet many writers have contemplated, tried, or succeeded. (Edgar Allen Poe. Baudelaire. Herman Hesse. Hart Crane. Vachel Lindsay. Anne Sexton. Joseph Conrad. Isak Dinesen. Maxim Gorky. Ernest Hemingway. Eugene O'Neill. Virginia Woolf....) Many others have suffered unnecessary agonies of melancholy or slipped into mood-related substance abuse.

The good news is that mood disorders are the most treatable of mental problems, and that creative people are, perhaps because of their level of self-awareness, more likely than most to seek treatment. This is not to say that further education isn't needed. It is. And so we should not attack reports that annoy us; instead, we should embrace any knowledge that might help our friends and colleagues.

Or, perchance, ourselves.

— Ed Hoornaert

Ed. note: Dr. Jamison has a new book out, *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness*, in which she describes her own manic-depressive illness.

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Barbara Faith, former NINC member and valued friend of many, died last month in Mexico, where she had made her home the past few years. Her friends and her legion of fans around the world will miss her.

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# Can Familiarity Breed Content?

(Continued from page 1)

the first book he wasn't. I still got my revenge, however, since he has already earned me a tidy sum."

**Randy Russell:** "I had not planned on the first book being the start of a series. I had already completed a second novel on contract to the publisher and been paid for it. Upon the first book's receiving favorable reviews, the publisher asked me to revise the second book to become a sequel to the first by changing the protagonist of the second book to that of the first book. I offer this information as evidence of how strongly publishers want/ed to do series. Because the second book had already been accepted and I'd already been paid, and because the second book was third-person and the first was first-person narrative, I declined their offer to revise. The publisher declined, in turn, to publish it and let me keep the advance. Meanwhile, the publisher contracted me to write two more mysteries using the protagonist of the first book. The first book received a nomination for an Edgar award and the publisher bumped the next two books, by supplemental contract, to hardcover. (I did rewrite that second book as a Rooster Franklin mystery and sold it back anew to the publisher, and it was brought out in hardcover as the fourth book in the series.)"

**Anne McCaffrey:** "Only the first two Dinosaur Planet books were done with a series in mind. My Pern series began as a 7,000-word short story. Two million words in thirteen full novels, plus three reference books later, I have not yet stopped a series that I hadn't intended to write in the first place."

**Ann and Evan Maxwell:** "Fiora, the ex-wife was the victim in the first book, but she was to disappear from the pages. She had a walk-on role in Book 2 but by the time we got to the third story, she had barged back onto the scene and would not be dislodged. So, instead of serial monogamy as in Travis McGee, with Fiddler as the only continuing character, we ended up with two continuing characters whose personal story plays out in the confines of the books. In other words, we set out to write a series

but it wasn't the one we eventually wrote."

**William Bernhardt:** "It was my editor at Ballantine who,

**What are the liberations and limitations of "going steady" with your principal fictional creation?**

after reading the first book, inquired whether I thought this could be the first of the series. Needless to say, I did. It is not until the second book, *Blind Justice*, that I think it begins to feel like a series. In *Blind Justice*, I made the point of introducing a more substantial 'supporting cast'—additional characters who could recur from book to book."

**Have you experienced a change of editor during the course of your series? If so, what effect (if any) did it have on the project?**

**Diane Mott Davidson:** "At my first house, I had four different editors, but the main editing job was done by the first one, a very clear-thinking woman. I had no 'change of philosophy' in the course of the first novel, as that woman's successors all understood and partook in her vision. Similarly, the editor at my next house, a brilliant woman who has edited the four succeeding books, understands Goldy very well. She read and was enthusiastic about the first published book in the series before ever deciding to buy the series."

**William Bernhardt:** "Joe Blades at Ballantine bought my first book and every

book I've written since. I consider myself very lucky in that regard. He's a first-rate editor."

**Carole Nelson Douglas:** "The Sword and Circlet fantasy series changed houses (because of an abusive editor) in mid-stream, and I ended up with three editors on it, all unsatisfactory. I again had a destructive editor for the Irene, Louie, and Taliswoman series, and made a change much for the better. I resisted as best I could while still having to work with [the previous] editor, and don't feel the books have been significantly affected, although I certainly was strained by the uneasy political position of having to fight the person who was essentially paying my salary by buying my books. Changing editors did not affect house support for these series, fortunately."

**Lois McMaster Bujold:** "I've been lucky with editorial continuity. I've been with Baen Books, which is owned by Jim Baen, from my very beginning in 1985. I've only had one change of sub-editor in all that time. This has had excellent long-term benefits for the Vorkosigan series: unlike most of my colleagues, I can brag that every one of my books is still in print, still selling (and cross-selling)."

**Ann and Evan Maxwell:** "The series has had six or seven different editors. Thankfully, for reasons ranging from intelligence to indifference, they left us alone to develop the series in our way, at our own pace."

**In series work, what special challenges do you face concerning character development, new plot lines, and/or secondary characters?**

**Diane Mott Davidson:** "It's not difficult to come up

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— Anne McCaffrey

with new plots or secondary characters; it's only challenging in successive books to weave in some of the characters *already introduced* who live in the town where Goldy works. These characters feel real to me and others, and occasionally I can feel them clamoring to get on stage."

**William Bernhardt:** "Ben Kincaid has changed significantly since his initial outing. I intentionally chose to make Ben, in the first book, a young, inexperienced, somewhat naive lawyer. Over the course of the five Justice books, Ben has matured, become more competent, become more capable. This evolution of character is just as important as plot, and in truth, although I sometimes have to struggle to come up with a new storyline, I always know 'where Ben is' at this point in his life. There are, as you may have noticed, other courtroom books on the market right now, but I do believe that the Justice books, principally because of the Ben Kincaid character, the humor, the examination of moral and ethical issues, and a few other factors, have a distinct flavor that some readers respond to favorably."

**Jean Auel:** "As new developments in the story (or the research material—such as the discovery of new painted caves in France) arise, they fall into place as the story progresses."

**Carole Nelson Douglas:** "When developing the Midnight Louie cat character, I planned his mystery incarnation as a long-running affair: 15 to 20 books or more. To permit this, I developed a romantic quadrangle of human characters who would provide complications (and satisfactions) for the readers in the long run. Each of the two men and two women are from backgrounds or occupations that allow them to function as a primary human detective in tandem with the series star: cat sleuth Midnight Louie. I have in the back of my mind that if I 'wear out' the human quartet after X number of books, I can simply move Louie to another cast of humans."

#### Why do you enjoy writing a series?

**Lois McMaster Bujold:** "Since the thing that fascinates me most as a writer is character creation, and since series

*I've come to love the breadth and width of character development and long-range plotting possibilities possible, and necessary, for series.*

— **Carole Nelson Douglas**

give the creation of character the most scope, I expect I'll always have an innate predilection for series."

**Diane Mott Davidson:** "I enjoy doing the series very much, and it gives me a context in

which to look at themes I find intriguing."

**Carole Nelson Douglas:** "At first, I found the idea of a series intimidating, but I've come to love the breadth and width of character development and long-range plotting possibilities possible, and necessary, for series. I prefer the long-range story-telling rewards of series. If you bring mainstream issues and approaches to a series, I think it will serve you and your career well."

**Anne McCaffrey:** "There are many science fiction writers who deplore the series writers: too much waffling on about too little substance. Perhaps, but I like to think I'm doing the Chekhovian thing: a slice of life, pulled out of a time which exists both before and after the events described. You know far more about the character or place you're writing about, and you yourself wish to explore the possibilities that cannot all be crammed into one book."

#### If you've ended a series, why did you?

**Randy Russell:** "Despite much early promise, the series did not sell well and the publisher discontinued it after four books. I was in shock. It took me a year to realize I needed to write something else...and I had been almost literally dragged kicking into doing a series in the first place."

**Patty Gardner Evans:** "I like the series very much, but its lifespan will be over when the fourth book is published (two in which Quinn Easley was a secondary character, and now two in which he has been the protagonist). Although the characters could continue in the single title romantic suspense market—as long as readership warranted it, of course—they appear in series romance, and the fact the same hero and heroine are making a second appearance already is an anomaly in a genre in which it is inherent that characters be the main protagonists only once, relegated to second banana status as soon as the resolution of their romantic problems is achieved, generally by marriage or the reaffirmation of an existing marriage. I used the first romantic device—a marriage—in the first book that featured Quinn Easley and am using the second—reaffirmation of an existing marriage—in the second. To bring them back a third time would require ignoring one of the basic ground rules of series romance. It wouldn't be difficult to think of a suspense plot, but it would be a trick to think of one that also puts their marriage as well as their lives in jeopardy once again. Instead, it is virtually a given that, in a third book, the romantic half of the romantic suspense would have less tension."

#### Do you have a preference for series writing over single title work?

**Randy Russell:** "I am currently writing non-series fiction, for which I do confess a preference. I like working with a protagonist who may or may not remain intact at the end of the story."

**Patty Gardner Evans:** "I prefer very loosely-tied spin-offs or stand-alone books because when I finish a book, I am generally finished with the characters, as well."

**William Bernhardt:** "Having published both series and non-series books, I think it's important to alter-



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nate them. I've found that my approach to the Ben Kincaid character and the Justice books is much more fresh and inventive if I do not go straight from one to the next."

**Jean Auel:** "I've been working 17 years on this project, and I want to do something else—maybe a mystery, or a thin little literary science fiction book, or something. But, I admit, I've learned a lot. I love the research. I can't think of anything more fun than learning anything I want and earning a living writing about it the way I want to."

**Ann and Evan Maxwell:** "We both continue to do non-series books. They are different flavors so we probably won't give up either approach."

## And the potential pitfalls?

**Diane Mott Davidson:** "For me, the most challenging part of writing a series is remembering the many, many details I have set up in the previous books regarding the characters' lives.

*I took particular care, when writing the early books, to make them stand-alones, just in case my series plans didn't come off.*

— **Lois McMaster Bujold**

Recently I was asking the homicide investigator I work with here in Colorado about weapons and what kind of holsters a cop would wear with each one. He told me what kind of

holster would be needed in the circumstances, and reminded me that Tom Schulz, the continuing homicide investigator in the Goldy series, carries a .45. That I would not have remembered this detail panicked me; I am now in the process of rereading all the previous books!"

**Ann and Evan Maxwell:** "Every fact you use about the characters' backgrounds comes back to haunt you in the most inconvenient way. Then there is the necessity of finding a fresh new way to impart some of the old back story. Fiddler has to describe some of what happened in earlier books so the new readers aren't lost, but he has to find a different way of saying it or the old readers will get bored. (Not to mention the old writers.)"

**Anne McCaffrey:** "A writer cannot always predict which characters will become popular. You must hit the right note that makes the reading public desire to know as much as possible, to devour all words relating to that character and what s/he does. The proof is always in the sales figures and the durability of the novels in question. The first novel I wrote thirty years ago is still in print. It continues to earn almost twice its original purchase price and occasionally triples it if I have a new generation of readers

who like what I write and want 'all' my titles."

**Lois McMaster Bujold:** "I took particular care, when writing the early books, to make them stand-alones, just in case my series plans didn't come off. I also deliberately, and from the very beginning, set up my series structure to side-step several of the pitfalls of series work. I contract them one at a time; I am never 'stuck' writing one series book too many. Since they all stand alone, potentially any could be the last, and I could walk away at any time, or take a break and do something different for one book or several. I do not necessarily write them in chronological order, though writing a 'prequel' is rather challenging. So, I hope, the reader will always get the best Vorkosigan book I can think of, not necessarily just the next Vorkosigan book I can think of."

## In Closing....

Series writing is not for everyone. Your great idea for a series may fail to strike a responsive spark with the necessary editors or readers, or may only succeed marginally, satisfying your publisher but failing to live up to your personal expectations. Then again, it may be that the very notion of dealing repeatedly with the same primary character(s) causes you to break out in hives and exhibit signs of creative claustrophobia. But for those writers who feel so inclined and are willing to take the risk, it's a field which offers numerous potential rewards, including a chance for the leisurely exploration of a complex network of primary and secondary characters in a detailed and evolving fictional world.

As Carole Nelson Douglas pointed out, "It's possible to become trapped in series that go nowhere. Many writers plow the series furrow because it offers regular if unspectacular money, and may mire their career in the backwater of publishing as a result. But it's also possible to break series out to the Big Time. Series can enslave you or free you, depending on how you build your multi-book world and how you tend it."

**Author's Note:** My thanks to the following NINC members, who took time out of their hectic schedules to respond to the questionnaire upon which this article was based: **Jean Auel** (the "Earth's Children" pre-historic fiction series); **William Bernhardt** (the "Justice" mainstream mystery series); **Lois McMaster Bujold** (the "Vorkosigan" science fiction series); **Diane Mott Davidson** (the "Goldy the Caterer" culinary mystery series); **Carole Nelson Douglas** (the "Irene Adler" adventure/historical mystery series, "Midnight Louie" cat-detective mystery series, "Sword and Circlet" high fantasy series, and "Talisman" high fantasy series); **Patricia Gardner Evans** (the "Eisley and Com-

pany" romantic suspense series); *Ann and Evan Maxwell* (the "Fiddler and Fiora" mystery series); *Anne McCaffrey* (the "Pern," "Dinosaur Planet," "Crystal Singer," "Talent," "Petaybean," and "Brain and Brawn" science fiction series); and *Randy Russell* (the "Rooster Franklin" mystery series).

*Judith Blackwell Myers* has published contemporary romances and YA fiction, but her favorite works-in-progress are *The Greenstone Bride* (a New Zealand historical) and *The Avilar Chronicles*, a collaborative science fiction series.

**Members:** To obtain a copy of the full minutes of the Board of Directors' meeting, send \$2 plus SASE to the P.O. Box. For an updated copy of the Bylaws, send \$2 plus SASE. For a copy of the Treasurer's Report, send \$1 plus SASE to the P.O. Box.

*You expect far too much of a first sentence. Think of it as analogous to a good country breakfast: what we want is something simple, but nourishing to the imagination. Hold the philosophy, hold the adjectives, just give us a plain subject and verb and perhaps a wholesome, nonfattening adverb or two.* **Larry McMurtry**



*Are We There Yet?* features whatever in the publishing/bookselling business affects our income, working conditions, blood pressure, and/or mental health. Whenever you come across something that applies, send it in.

## Getting the Most from Your Copy Editor

By SUSAN ELIZABETH PHILLIPS

"You can mess with my chick, you can mess with my mind, but don't touch my Harley." I've thought of this anonymous biker more than once as I've dealt with copy editors. What I want to say to them is, "You can mess with my sentence structure, you can mess with my punctuation, but don't touch my style."

Several books ago, after one too many encounters with the dark side of an anonymous copy editor's blue pencil, it occurred to me that copy editors can't read minds, and writers have different expectations. How could a copy editor hope to please me if I didn't provide some guidelines? I began sending a letter of instruction along with my revised manuscript, and I was so satisfied with the results that I've done it ever since. Does this produce an error-free book? No. Does it save me hours of hassle and soaring blood pressure? You bet.

I've also begun including a copy of the timetable I use as I work. (Characters' birthday, time schedule for each scene, etc.) My favorite copy editor—Yes, she and I now have a personal relationship—has told me I'm the only

non-science fiction writer to do this, and it makes her job much easier.

I am reproducing my most recent letter of instruction in its entirety, not because I want to bore you with the peculiarities of my anal-retentive mind, but merely to illustrate what has worked for me. Remember that each house has its own style guidelines, although I've never found that to be a problem.

One other thing.... If any of you ever tease me about the Chevy Bronco, there's gonna be some big-time hell to pay!

TO: Copy editor, *Kiss an Angel*  
FROM: Susan Elizabeth Phillips  
ENCLOSURE: Timetable for action in book

WARNING TO COPY EDITOR: Four of my last five books were published with one big error each. I'm a walking disaster area when it comes to cars. In *Fancy Pants*, I have a four-door Buick Riviera. In *It Had to be You*, a Chevy Bronco. I got the cars straight in *Heaven, Texas*, but the heroine's navy pumps turn into black pumps in the same scene. Please be vigilant!!! I try hard—really I →



# Getting the Most from your Copy Editor

(Continued from page 7)

do—but you're not dealing with an orderly mind!

[At this point I comment on any problem specific to the book. For example, forming possessives of football teams whose names end with "s" proved tricky in *It Had to be You*, I went into some detail on my logic and was overruled by the copy editor, who proved to be correct. In *Kiss an Angel*, I have a specific request regarding how I want to avoid capitalizing the brand name of a cattle prod I'm using in a generic sense. I'll probably get overruled on that one, too.]

**COMMAS:** Comma usage seems to be getting more arbitrary all the time. I'm attempting to get back to the basics of semi-closed punctuation. I'd like to be consistent, if nothing else.

I am trying to limit commas after a single introductory prepositional phrase unless there is a definite break. Again, this is rather arbitrary. Double check me.

In a list of three items, I like a comma before the conjunction. ("a ball, a tree, and a flower.") I want to be consistent.

I see commas used before "because" all the time when it is preceded by an independent clause, and I don't like it. From my understanding, it's incorrect since the use of "because" automatically turns the second clause into a dependent clause, and commas are not used when a dependent clause follows an independent clause. [Source: Purdue University Writing Lab Grammar Hotline, 316-494-3723.] The exception is when clarity demands it, and the sentence simply reads better. Please eliminate any of these commas I've thrown in arbitrarily.

**SPELLING:** I am a terrible speller. My spell check has picked up a lot of my errors, but watch me like a hawk for homonyms. I am also prone to malapropisms. (So sue me. I'm nice to kids and old ladies.)

**COMPOUNDS:** I get very mixed up on compound words. What is, what isn't, what's hyphenated. Please fix.

**DIALOGUE:** Please don't "grammaticize" my dialogue! Query if something seems out of character. Same goes for character's internal thoughts when written in specific character's voice.

**SUBJUNCTIVE:** I used to be a whiz with the subjunctive, but over the years I've gotten mixed up. I'd like to return to the proper, old-fashioned use—expressing doubt, wish, or condition contrary to fact. Please make consistent if I've screwed up.

**PAST PERFECT TENSE in flashbacks:** When a flashback consists of several paragraphs of narration, I use the past perfect to get into it. But once it is established, I want to use it as sparingly as possible. I want to maintain narrative flow, but still be semi-grammatical.

Don't hesitate to call me with questions/discussion. I

understand copy editors aren't encouraged to call authors, but I'd rather clarify something over the phone than have errors in manuscript. You may reach me at [home phone].

Thank you so much for your efforts to produce a clean, consistent manuscript.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips

One final plea to my fellow writers: Let's start making it our business to identify the good copy editors. When someone has done a particularly skillful job, get the person's name so you can request him/her for your next manuscript. Send a note to the copy editor's boss. Tell other writers. I have long believed we could improve the quality of copy editing by identifying the superstars. Who knows? Maybe the good ones might even end up getting paid what they're worth.

## NINK Notes:

### Additions/Corrections to Roster

Kay Bergstrom — 1666 Clermont, Denver CO  
80220-1153, phone # 303-322-0749

Edith Layton Felber — 2 Putnam Avenue, Jericho  
NY 11753, fax # 516-YES-I-FAX

Susan Elizabeth Phillips — fax # 708-416-0226

Mary Jo Putney—fax # 410-321-5405

### Industry News

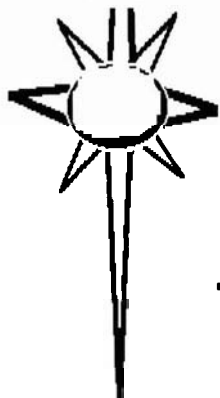
Good news for YA authors and everyone who's been worried about reports that the current generation of children aren't reading: Juvenile paperback sales for the first six months of 1995 were 39.2% ahead of those for the first half of 1994 and led all book sales industry-wide.

### Do Do Those NINC Dues You Do So Well....

Central Coordinator Randy Russell (who is not with some covert government agency, despite his title) is currently coordinating the collection of annual dues. To give Randy his due, he has already mailed out renewal forms, and he asks that everyone remember that dues are \$50 and payable by January 15; after that date, a \$10 late fee is assessed. An additional \$10 is required of non-U.S. members to cover the increased postage.



# DUE NORTH



## Only in Canada, You Say?

By KAY GREGORY

**A** Canadian Best Seller list? No such thing, I decided, when this article was originally suggested to me. Wrong. A little research uncovered at least three.

*MacLeans*, a Canadian newsmagazine much like *Time*, publishes a hardback top-ten fiction list which is sometimes reprinted in my local paper. This list usually features Messrs. Redfield, Waller, King, Follett, Grisham, etc. followed by Ms. Steel, a couple of mysteries, and a couple of Canadian literary icons—at time of writing, Robertson Davies and Timothy Findley—whose sales are boosted by massive orders from colleges and libraries.

*MacLeans'* head office does not return calls, but according to a writer friend of mine who used to work for a local book store, they phone a selection of stores and ask for a list of the books that have sold best in a particular week. This friend also told me that since the calls were often taken by busy clerks trying to cope with a lineup of impatient customers, they would merely glance at the shelves and reel off the names of whatever caught their eye—frequently the books that were *not* selling well, as there were more of them, and the staff wanted to move them off the shelves.

The *Globe & Mail*, a Toronto newspaper calling itself Canada's national newspaper, produces a hardback and a paperback list featuring essentially the same authors as *MacLeans*, although the paperback list may not include the Canadian literary icons. This paper doesn't return calls either, but the lead-in to their lists states that figures are taken from the collected sales of 500 book stores across Canada, including chains and independents. This was confirmed by the manager of a local Smithbooks.

The *Financial Post*, also a Toronto newspaper, actually returned my long distance call, bless them. They, too, publish both hardback and paperback lists. The helpful lady I spoke to admitted candidly that their lists are unscientific, and that the more stores they poll, the more their numbers fluctuate.

Usually they poll eighteen or twenty independent stores across the country, with a greater concentration of calls to the more populated provinces. She told me they are more interested in getting a feel for what is selling best across Canada than in producing lists based strictly on

cash-register sales. They no longer poll the chains because they felt chain sales figures failed to give an accurate picture of national reading preferences (See paragraph on *MacLeans*). Interestingly, the *Financial Post* list is not vastly different from the other two, apart from the occasional regional blip when a book has sold well in a particular area. My informant also mentioned that they can always tell when an author has been in a particular city as sales invariably go up for that week.

When I asked Canadian fiction writers (category romance, historical, suspense, and science fantasy) how they feel about Best Seller lists, the comments I heard most often were that as mail order and supermarket sales are not taken into account, the lists are skewed, manipulative, misleading, and even dangerous. One writer said they are fabricated for commercial purposes. "If they're pushed enough, they're bestsellers. They don't reflect quality."

Several writers complained about regional and strictly Canadian book lists (if these exist, I didn't discover them) which, they said, do not reflect reality, as any book selling over 5000 copies in Canada is considered a bestseller. I can't substantiate this, but have heard the same figure quoted myself.

Certainly category romances which sell in the hundreds of thousands, are not taken into account on any list. There seems to be a feeling among writers that Canadian publishing (with the exception of Harlequin) is pretentious, and uninterested in commercial success—that obscure prose of dubious literary merit is favored over the kind of prose most people actually read.

One writer said his New York publisher once told him that only 4% of their sales come from Canada. Most of us have U.S. or U.K. publishers—so with figures like that, do we care about Canadian lists? Why should we?

Are we interested in U.S. lists? Of course we all dream of the *New York Times*, but we are realists and know it's unlikely to happen. A few of the writers I talked to have made the Waldenbooks list, which is nice for the ego and useful for future advertising, but seems to make no detectable difference to royalty statements. It has also been suggested that some of those who scorn the lists change their minds the moment their names appear on one. In that respect, I imagine, Canadians are no different from Americans.

In short, most of us spend very little time fretting about the lists, whether U.S. or Canadian, but are delighted if we happen to make them.

*Kay has A Perfect Arrangement in December and Man of the Mountains in April '96, both Harlequin Romances.*

# A BOOK BY ITS COVER

## III: *But I Wrote the Damn Thing!*

By LAURA RESNICK

A young (or at least not yet old) novelist is writing a series of articles on cover art for the monthly newsletter of her writers' organization. Despite the blonde hair, she's reasonably bright, and she has guessed what her fellow authors want to know more than anything else about the cover process—because it's also what *she* has always wanted to know.

Pen in hand, clean notebook spread out on her desk, she phones various publishers and, in her most reasonable, neutral, polite tone of voice, asks their art directors what a writer can do to assist the art department and influence the cover process in a useful, productive way. The answers she gets might discourage anyone who isn't a writer and consequently used to being at the bottom of the publishing food chain. The tone of the answers varies more than the substance.

Incredulous: "Writers?"

Nervous: "As little as possible."

Bewildered: "Excuse me?"

Contemptuous: "What do *they* know about the marketplace?"

Suspicious: "Who *are* you?"

Discouraging, yes, but not entirely unexpected. Surely if the author's input were actively desired in the cover process, somebody would have mentioned it by now. However, there *are* ways to establish productive communication with your publisher's art department, just as there are ways to influence your book's cover. You won't always be successful, and it won't always be satisfying, but, just as you can't sell a book unless you submit it and risk rejection, you also can't get the cover you want unless you make every effort to get it—and risk being rebuffed or ignored.

First of all, you probably already know that some authors can get cover "consultation" written into their contracts; a rare few can even get cover "approval." Obviously, getting something in writing is always better than relying on a verbal promise—and it's *much* better than a vaguely hostile mumble suggesting that someone at the publishing house might let you see the cover sketches if they feel like it. So—can you get cover consultation (or approval), and what does it really mean?

Let's deal with the easy one first: cover approval. This means exactly what it says; the contract says that you must *approve* of the cover before they can put it on your book. I'm sure it will come as no surprise to you that this is *extremely* difficult to get. Not only must you be a *terribly* important author, a real cash-cow (if you'll pardon the expression), but agent Ruth Cohen suggests

that your publisher will usually need an added incentive to give you this privilege: you might get it if, for example, another publisher is trying to seduce you away and your publisher has every reason to fear they're in danger of losing you. Since the previous articles in this series have already pointed out that as more people get involved in the cover process, the art director's job gets proportionately harder and more frustrating, it's not surprising that art directors dislike (to put it very mildly) the whole concept of giving an author cover approval.

Moreover, giving a writer cover approval can be very expensive for a publisher. Agent Eleanor Wood explains: "I believe that would be extremely difficult to include in a contract, as the publisher might have to commission multiple paintings at that rate. Several years ago I heard that Bantam had agreed to cover approval, and after at least three paintings, Bantam cried, 'Never again!'"

Cover consultation, a more nebulous concept than cover approval, isn't easy to get written into a contract, but a writer who is important to the publisher can often get it. George Cornell, NAL's Mass Market Art Director, considers author consultation "problematic" and likens it to "choosing a wife for your son." However, contractual cover consultation doesn't necessarily *mean* anything.

Irene Gallo, Art Director at Tor Books, points out that cover "consultation" merely guarantees that the publisher must *show* the author the cover somewhere along the way; the art department is not obliged to pay any

*If author input were actively desired in the cover process, somebody would have mentioned it by now.*

attention to the writer's opinions. So your entire "consultation" may actually consist of looking at a

reproduction of the completed artwork and saying, "What is this washed-out, tasteless, semi-pornographic monstrosity you intend to put on my book?"

However, there are ways to make your cover consultation more effective. Agent Ruth Cohen says that the key issue is to try to control *when* the publisher must show you what they're doing. She recommends trying to see the illustrator's sketches in order to get some insight into what the art department is trying to do with your cover; remember, this is the stage at which the art director and editor may well be suggesting revisions, so it's a feasible time for you to make suggestions, too. Promise to return the sketches by Federal Express the day after you receive them, if necessary, or ask to have copies faxed to you.

"Similarly," Cohen says, "the earlier you see the de-

sign, the typography, the placement of your name, and so on, the more likely it is that your opinion can be taken into account."

For the most part, Cohen warns, the author must rely on her editor's good graces if she hopes to see the cover art in its early stages. Indeed, Irene Gallo says that at Tor, the author's involvement in the process often depends on the editor; certain editors at Tor, she adds, routinely consult their writers about the cover. Whether or not you officially have cover consultation, most art directors seem to prefer that you communicate with them via your editor. Although Gallo doesn't actively encourage author input, she does say, "If the writer has a strong idea for the cover, then by all means, pass it along. Send your editor a page or two of vivid cover description." She cautions, however, that writers should understand that the cover won't look like the visions in their heads.

Agent Eleanor Wood once negotiated a contract where the artist was specified: Michael Whelan, winner of more than a dozen Hugo Awards for Best Professional Artist in science fiction and fantasy. Wood adds, "I [also recently negotiated] a contract that included author approval of the artist, as well as an agreement by the Publisher to republish three previous and in-print books by this author with new art by the approved artist."

Although fantasy and historical author Jennifer Roberson has never had cover consultation written into a contract, she says, "I have on many occasions requested particular artists, and explained why. Often my editors do make an attempt to fulfill my request, so long as it suits the marketing direction they feel is vital." She even cites one instance where "I was very vocal with regard to repeating a particular artist's name because I liked what he'd done for one of my novels, and although the publisher didn't want to go that way, they did hire him to please me. It was a successful and effective cover, and I bought the original."

The most detailed and helpful advice about how an author can offer input on the cover in a way which is considered helpful and productive (rather than annoying and interfering) is probably offered by Gene Mydlowski of Harper Paperbacks. He recommends that the author send him *lots* of information, via the editor. "Don't lock into a specific idea," he warns. "Don't demand that it *must* be *this*. That's not useful or helpful."

He suggests, rather, that the author send him a variety of visual material to point him and the illustrator in the right direction: photos, illustrations, even other book covers which you feel express the right mood or style, or which would attract your audience; photos of people who resemble your characters—or verbal suggestions such as, "the character looks like so-and-so in this particular movie"; photos from costume books to illustrate the right fabrics and styles; photos which illustrate the right furniture, setting, flora and fauna, background details, and visual orientation. Mydlowski defines the writer's useful input as giving the art department visual brainstorming, support, inspiration, and suggestions—as opposed to demanding a specific cover.

He adds, "Writers need to understand that the cover is *not* a visual representation of their book. It's a marketing tool." It is the means by which a new reader with three seconds to spare is convinced that she simply *must* pick up your book. "Writers tend to be literal rather than visual," Mydlowski says. Hence, they may have misconceptions about what makes a good cover.

These are things to keep in mind, because your art director is only going to pay attention to your input if something you suggest or send him make him stop and say, "Hey—now *that's* interesting. That's eye-catching!

That's a good visual concept!"

**Cover "consultation" merely guarantees that the publisher must show the author the cover somewhere along the way.**

If you're that rare author who doesn't want to participate in the cover process, either because you

think you have no understanding of visual imagery or because you figure that the publisher's employees know better than you do, you may want to consider some of the things which strongly influenced my opinions about this while researching these articles.

I would say that I am indeed more literal than visual in my thinking; I admire visual art because my mind doesn't naturally work that way. I don't for a moment suppose that I know more about composition and design than art directors and designers who have studied these subjects and worked in this field for years. However, I *do* think I know more about my book, its audience, and what's appropriate for its cover than (to name one effective example passed along to me) a 23-year-old editor who's going to leave publishing forever next year to have babies. Yet, in too many scenarios, she has more influence that I do over my cover, the cover which will affect my career (possibly for years to come) rather than hers. I also think I know more about it than (to name another example given to me) a 35-year-old editor who doesn't like the genre I write in and is looking for another job.

And you know what else? I think I know more about it than some of the sales representatives who offer their expertise in cover conferences where my opinions, in many cases, would be resented or ignored. One publishing professional tells a story about a sales rep who insisted that the title of a romance novel *must* be changed because the title character's name made no sense to him. The editor explained to him that the name was, in fact, also the name of one of the most popular perfumes in the world. Any woman who's ever watched television or flipped through a women's magazine would recognize the name instantly. The sales rep had never heard of the perfume and remained convinced that *he* knew best what women would recognize and buy. One of the few bits of conventional wisdom in publishing which I actually believe is that half-naked female models dominated the covers of the romance genre for a decade because male sales reps and male buyers liked to look at them.

So while there may be letters to the editor in ➔

# But I Wrote the Damn Thing

(Continued from page 11)

next month's *NINK* saying that Resnick should show more respect for publishing professionals, I think that if people resembling the above examples are adding their two cents to decisions about my book's cover (in addition, yes, to publishing professionals whose input is far more astute and valuable than mine), then I can't afford to stand by idly and hope for the best. Remember the golden rule: other than word of mouth, the cover is the single most important means by which a writer attracts new readers.

**Writers need to understand that the cover is not a visual representation of their book. It's a marketing tool.**

Now, if you remember the last article in this series, you may remember that I was celebrating because I had recently learned that my suggestion is going to be used on the cover of my next romance novel. I do not have cover consultation, but my editor is Denise Little, one of the few people in publishing who actively seeks cover input from her authors (indeed, one might even go so far as to say she *nags*). Considering how many publishing professionals are leery (to put it mildly) of authors who want cover input, I was curious about what led Denise to actually *solicit* author input on her imprint's covers.

Her decision, she says, was the result of two factors: inexperience and overwork. She had never worked as an editor before the first day she walked into Zebra Books and took charge of her own imprint, Denise Little Presents. Managing DLP, as well as acquiring and editing books for other Zebra imprints, and receiving up to eight feet of mail per week left Denise very little time to research cover ideas for every book. "Since Zebra is not a system-oriented, hierarchical house, there were no hard-and-fast rules laid out for me about 'how it's done.' I made up the rules as I went along, and I thought that asking for cover input from the person who wrote the book and therefore knew it—and the period and background—best, made perfect sense."

While some authors have been so favorably impressed by the DLP covers that they choose to leave all decisions to Denise, she finds that most of her writers do come up with good cover concepts—even if the first few ideas have to be tossed out. Since writers are usually pretty accustomed to having some of their ideas rejected, Denise says that saying "no" to an idea has never presented a problem and usually results in the writer simply coming up with better ideas. Denise advises writers to focus on an arresting image which is representative of the book. Taking this advice into account, I finally—after weeks of leafing through magazines and art books—found an image which

I knew was perfect for my South American jungle book: a Peruvian scarlet macaw, wings slightly blurred in flight, soaring over a tropical jungle. Since I was only halfway through the manuscript at that point, I taped the picture above my computer screen and found a way to use the imagery in a pivotal scene in the book. We think it's going to be a lovely cover.

Since DLP is a new imprint, the jury is still out on its long-range commercial success. Time will tell if Denise Little's unconventional approach to packaging will continue to pay off as well as it did with Mickee Madden's *Everlastin'*, which won the Waldenbooks award for most innovative cover of 1994.

In the meantime, as agent Eleanor Wood points out, "art directors differ widely in how receptive they are to authors' or agents' suggestions. My advice is to keep the editor and, where possible, the art director informed of your opinion (e.g. the kind of message the cover should convey, whether or not you liked the artist's work for your last book, etc.)." In this way, bit by bit, step by step, you may eventually gain some influence over what everyone agrees is an extremely important aspect of your book's (and career's) success.

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## INTRODUCING...

The following authors have made application for membership in *NINC* and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this *NINK* issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of *NINC*:

### New Applicants

Laura DeVries (Laura Gordon), Grand Junction CO  
Lawrence Evans (Lawrence Watt-Evans, Nathan Archer),  
Gaithersburg MD  
Nina Gettler (Nina Beaumont), Seattle WA  
Noreen Gilpatrick, Fond du Lac WI  
Ronald Kidd, Nashville TN  
Stephanie Mittman, Syosset NY  
Sally Helen Reid, Cedar Park TX  
Elizabeth Daniels Squire, Alexander NC

### New Members

Harold Adams, Minnetonka MN  
Dora M. Brown (Dana Kindsey), Dallas TX  
Carol P. Budd, San Ramon CA  
Linda Buechting (Kelly Adams, Kelly Jamison), Quincy IL  
Sandra Detrixhe (Cassandra Austin), Concordia KS  
Jen Heaton (Caroline Cross), Kirkland WA  
Deanna Marliss (Diana Mars), Glenview IL  
Ralph McInerney, Notre Dame, IN  
Marilyn Meredith (E. M. Meredith), Springville CA  
Tara Lee Reames (Tara Taylor Quinn), Scottsdale AZ  
Marian H. Rogers (Marian J.A. Jackson), New York NY  
Denise Dietz Wiley (Denise Dietz), Colorado Springs CO

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## EAST OF THE HUDSON

### All That's Golden

Most of us writers have never heard of Golden-Lee Book Distributors, but I had a couple of conversations last week that made me realize my own fate is tied to more people and corporations than I thought.

Golden-Lee Book Distributors is one of the nation's biggest suppliers of hardbacks and paperbacks, a major player in our success or failure as authors. With four warehouses around the country, the firm orders and sells books by the thousands, sometimes scores of thousands. A problem at Golden-Lee would be bigger than the closing of a hundred independent bookstores. Such problems have been rumored for more than a year.

Golden-Lee officials have denied that the firm is about to file for bankruptcy, but other sources in the book business say that Chapter 11 is a real possibility.

One publishing executive says that collapse of the company is entirely possible and, worse, that it could cost New York publishers as much as \$60 million in accounts receivable. Writers don't normally cry over publisher losses, but in this case, we might keep the Kleenex handy. Why?

Because losses of that magnitude probably would result in sharp corporate cutbacks, particularly in field sales and account service. Fewer sales reps mean less attention to new books, more emphasis on brand-name authors, and less attention to backlist. Those are not new trends, but major losses with the collapse of a distributor could accelerate them drastically.

In other words, if you haven't already made it, you'll probably have a tougher time making it in the future. Not good news for anybody, but I felt it myself the other day when I walked into my local independent book store a few minutes after the owner got a call from the regional sales rep for one of my several publishers.

The rep told the book store owner she would no longer be making personal sales calls. From now on, the store will have to look at a seasonal catalogue and then call the publisher's phone bank in New York to place an order.

In other words, my next book won't have as high a profile as the last one did in my own home town. If the bookseller doesn't read the catalogs carefully, or if she forgets to compensate for the difference of time zones, or if the phones are busy too many times, the book won't get ordered.

The Golden-Lee problems are attributed to fierce competition among distributors and a clear trend toward consolidation. Larger and larger distributors, fewer and fewer

book stores and a shrinking number of publishers are facts of life. Now it looks as though there are going to be fewer reps, cheaper catalogs, and less attention to publicity.

There are days I wish I had stayed in the newspaper business.

Then I try to call one of my former colleagues and discover that he has been laid off or pushed out the back door of the city room by the cost-cutters with their "early retirement" schemes.

At least nobody can take OUR typewriters away from us.

### Cries and Whispers

I've been watching the progress of Nicholas Evans's stunningly successful *The Horse Whisperer*, mainly because it seems to be another one of the books that the literary establishment loves to hate.

The book is already a success, of course, at least from the writer's point of view. Delacorte paid a bit more than \$3 million for worldwide publication rights and Robert Redford weighed in with another \$3 million for film rights.

In other words, Nick Evans is independently wealthy, no matter what the critics say. Not surprisingly, the critics have retaliated savagely. Michiko Kakutani's daily review in the *New York Times* suggested Fabio should have been the cover model. The *Sunday Times* reviewer said, "There is little (in the book) that is not badly written, sentimentally bloated, and wholly devoid of authentic feeling."

Personally, I thought the Fabio line was a cheap shot. Nobody deserves an Italian Stallion cover, not even on a horse book. But the other review was a reminder of the gulf that lies between we who write popular fiction and those who believe it is their duty to maintain the philosophical and artistic purity of contemporary literature.

(Yes, the critics of the NYT do sometimes remind me of the Serbs, those demonic proponents of ethnic cleansing.)

Slowly but surely, gang, I'm coming to the conclusion that we who write commercial fiction have to get over it, as my daughter says. We ain't going to teach that pig to sing and we may as well quit wasting our energy. We are doing something that most literary critics find loathsome and vile. We are telling popular stories that affirm the positive human values that intellectuals find abhorrent.

Love, loyalty, courage, and hope. Those are the values endorsed by popular fiction. They also seem to be values dismissed as "sentimental" or worse by critics.

If pushed to a choice, I know my choice. I'll be called names and sell books, rather than vice versa; and so, I suspect, will most of you.



## EAST OF THE HUDSON

(Continued from page 13)

### The Lists

The *Wall Street Journal* weighed into the continuing discussion of best-seller lists last month with a short and inconclusive analysis of the Big Five lists, those published by *Publishers Weekly*, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Business Week*.

The *Journal's* reporter pointed out several facts that have been discussed here, including the fact that most of the lists count the easiest numbers and miss some of the most important.

Only the *New York Times*, for instance, counts sales in warehouse clubs. Not one of the lists counts book club sales, despite the fact that almost a billion dollars are sold through the mail. The *New York Times* is the only list that counts "sales" by independent distributors, who stock supermarkets and news stands, but those numbers are tricky because IDs often strip or return more books than they sell.

The piece also revealed that all lists except the *Journal's* involve some kind of weighted analysis, the formulas for which are supposed to be known only to the compilers. In other words, some sales count for more than others. The *Journal* counts raw sales from a limited number of chains and calculates an index of sales relative to other titles.

None of these lists is without flaw and several seem to be amenable to manipulation. Chip McGrath of the *New York Times* admitted as much to the *Journal*. He said thought is being given to changing methods to monitor new sales channels to prevent manipulation. McGrath also said that the NYT was considering "retiring" books from the list after they appear for more than a year.

I guess he got sick of seeing Robert James Waller's name every week.

Nothing earth-shattering in the piece, but it did confirm our suspicion that the list-compilers are looking over their shoulders more than they used to. It's about time.

### Move Over, Gutenberg

The shape of the future is something called Docutech. It's a machine the size of an old IBM 3600, which is to say it would fill a small room. It stores and prints finished books on demand, and that, my friends, is the way things will be.

The Docutech, made by Xerox, produces limited runs of custom packages of material—college textbooks—at a cost that compares with traditional texts. For instance, the machine at Cornell University produces 25 custom packages of articles for a graduate course in Japanese history for \$32.50 per copy.

Not only that, the software for the Docutech keeps track of the reproduction rights involved in the compilations. Publishers will get paid for use of materials and so, presumably, will writers. The \$32.50 history text includes \$13.70 in royalties.

And if the first printing of a book sells out, the Docutech can crank out new ones at the rate of 135 pages a minute.

The Docutech's secret is digital technology. It can store thousands of pages of text on optical platters like compact disks and reprint those pages at will. At the moment, the process is black and white only, because color copying is too slow. So far, the machines are used almost exclusively in college books stores where typical reader demand is for limited numbers of custom collections of printed material.

But just remember this: the first printing press had wooden type and setting a book by hand used to take weeks. The IBM 3600, which used to fill a little room, has been replaced by laptops. We are not that far from books printed on demand at your corner book store.

That's when we won't need to worry so much about what happens east of the Hudson.

### Goosebumps, Anyone?

My kids are grown up so I had never heard the name "R. L. Stine" until it started showing up last year on the *USA Today* bestseller list, the only list that mixes kids' books with adult titles.

After I realized that Stine sells more books than three bestsellers combined, I began to pay attention. So did the rest of the world. Now Stine, creator of a long list of Goosebumps books for the young and bloody-minded, has been revealed.

The best-selling author in America, 90 million copies worth, is a balding, bespectacled professional story-teller who once edited Scholastic Books' *Bananas* magazine and wrote category romances for Simon & Schuster.

Stine, who lives in New York, has a steady grasp on what he is doing, a "formula," if you will. According to an interview in *PW*, he develops a catchy title and then works backward to develop an appropriate plot.

"If I have a story idea but I can't think of a good title for it, I don't do the book," he says. After that, the books

are carefully constructed, some would call it "crafted," with misdirection and camouflage, to keep the young readers guessing.

As for writer's block, Stine is blissfully frank: "I've never had it. I've never had a day where I couldn't write 15 pages. Some days it's horrible, some days I don't know what language it's in. But I know I'll go back and fix it up."

A real pro, with discipline and pride in his work. He isn't curing cancer, he's telling stories.

Will he be read in a hundred years? Probably not, but then, neither will you or I.

Nor will Norman Mailer or Raymond Carver, unless I miss my guess.

In the field of the written word, nobody knows what will last. At the end of the 21st century, every writer living today will be dead and all but one or two will be forgotten. Writers write, and the rest of it is baloney. R. L. Stine has learned that. I'm going to take a lesson from him.

— Evan Maxwell

## West of the Pecos

A comparison of several major best-seller lists for the same week earlier this year illustrates the vagaries of these lists. *USA Today* groups all books together on its main list but also maintains a "category" list, i.e. hc fiction, sc fiction, etc. On all lists but the overall *USA Today* list only the first 15 places are published. \* denotes a Novelists, Inc. author, NA = not available.

Title/ HC fiction	NYT	USA overall	Today / Cat	WSJ	PW	Ingram Wholesale
<i>Rainmaker</i>	1	1	1	1	1	3
<i>Let Me Call You.</i>	2		2	2	2	1
<i>Apocalypse Watch</i>		2	NA		3	2
<i>Celestine Prophecy</i>	3	16	3	4	4	5
<i>Ladder of Years</i>	4	24	4	7	3	4
<i>Moo</i>	6	67	8	13	5	10
<i>Mind Prey</i>		36	NA		6	8
<i>Bridges of M. C.</i>	8	37	7	9	8	9
<i>Border Music</i>	10	81	9	11	9	21
<i>Thin Air</i>		54	NA		11	7
<i>Dogs Life</i>	11	113	11		10	14
<i>Carousel</i>	12					13
<i>Riding the Rap</i>					12	12
<i>Chil-dren/Jedi</i>	13	127	13	15		
<i>Mutant Message</i>	14	122	12			11

By the way, 25 of the titles on *USA Today's* Top 150 list for this week were written by R. L. Stine.

— PGE

Title/ Massmarket	NYT	USA overall	Today / Cat	PW	Ingram Wholesale
<i>Remember Me</i>	1	7	3	2	3
<i>Chamber</i>	2	5	2	1	2
<i>Key to Midnight</i>	3	21	6	4	8
<i>K is for Killer</i>	4	33	8	7	12
<i>Circle of Friends</i>	5	18	5	3	4
<i>Tea Planters Bride</i>	6	51	9	13	11
<i>Conga</i>	7	14	4	5	10
<i>Two Alone*</i>		38	NA		6
<i>Until Forever</i>		12	NA	6	7
<i>Dream Man*</i>		48	NA		9
<i>Hidden Riches*</i>	8	73	13	10	17
<i>All That Glitters</i>	9	3	1	6	5
<i>Storming Heaven</i>	10	66	12	15	14
<i>The Stone Diaries</i>	11	22	7	3	3
<i>Waterworks</i>	12	76	14		22
<i>Cry to Heaven</i>	13	88	15		
<i>Op Center</i>	14	64	11		23
<i>Day After Tom.</i>	15	58	10	12	19
<i>Tunnel Vision</i>		13	NA	7	15
<i>Walking Shadow</i>		25	NA	13	





*Baltimore '96*

## Site for 1996 Conference Chosen

By VICTORIA THOMPSON

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce that we have selected Baltimore as the site for the 1996 conference. Our goal was to choose a city that would be near our members in the Northeast since our last conference there was in 1991. Our first choice was New York City, since we felt the time had come to put our conference in the publishers' backyard. But when we got bids, we discovered that room rates would be about twice what we had been paying (we know, other conferences get much lower rates in NYC, but they are bringing in ten times as many people and they're not coming in October which is a peak tourist season). We then investigated Boston and Chicago and found them equally as expensive. That was when we discovered Baltimore.

Baltimore is a city that has rejuvenated itself in recent years, and they have restored the historic downtown harbor area, turning it into a tourist mecca. Baltimore Harbor is the place where the rockets' red glare gave proof through the night that our flag was still there, inspiring Francis Scott Key to write the "Star Spangled Banner." Today it is also home to the National Aquarium, which includes an Amazon rain forest and an Atlantic Ocean coral reef tank [and a great shark exhibit. ed.] as well as the Maryland Science Center and Davis Planetarium, the Peabody Institute and Johns Hopkins University, the Fort McHenry National Monument, and the U.S. frigate Constellation. Baltimore was home to Edgar Allen Poe from 1832 until his death, and his former house and his grave site are open to the public.

The hotel we have selected for our conference is the historic Lord Baltimore Hotel, which is now a Radisson. The Lord Baltimore is the city's only Historic Landmark Hotel, now restored to its original opulence as a result of a multi-million-dollar renovation. The hotel's sleeping rooms are elegantly furnished and include eighteen spacious two-bedroom suites for our members who prefer those accommodations. The Lord Baltimore is connected by skywalk to the Inner Harbor area and HarborPlace, an upscale indoor shopping center with more than 150 restaurants and boutiques. The hotel also provides free shuttle service to the Inner Harbor Area.

The city of Baltimore is served by Baltimore Washington International Airport, which has numerous direct flights to virtually every major city daily. The airport is only about fifteen minutes from downtown. Amtrak also serves the city, and Baltimore is a convenient drive from most areas on the East Coast. The hotel provides indoor, valet parking.

The dates for the Baltimore Conference are October 17-20, 1996. Mark your calendars now!

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