

Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 7, Number 1

January 1996

Want to expand readership? Consider entering . . .

The Spin-Off Zone

By JANICE DAVIS SMITH

Your editor loves your hero's brother and thinks he should have a book of his own. An easy sale. That's good. You hate your hero's brother and were glad to be rid of him. That's bad. Your readers write you demanding the story of that shadowy spy boss. A built-in audience. That's good. You have no clue who this man really is, nor do you care. That's bad.

You have just entered the spin-off zone.

For those who have managed to sidestep this zone—or perhaps have purposely avoided it—for the purposes of this article a spin-off means a book featuring elements in common with a prior work, either setting or characters, most frequently secondary characters who then become main characters in their own book. It does not mean a continuing series featuring the same, recurring main character or characters, such as A. E. Maxwell's Fiddler and Fiora; that was the topic of an earlier article.

First of all, there is an obvious question: Why do writers do spin-offs at all? From a survey of more than twenty writers currently involved in or with experience in writing

spin-offs, the most frequent answer was simple: there was a secondary character that became so intriguing that the writer felt compelled to explore him or her. As Annette Broadrick put it, "Sometimes a character would just hang around in my head...I'd finally have to promise him an entire book to stop his nagging."

Many writers said they wrote spin-offs in direct response to reader requests, with at least two saying that persistent requests from a single reader for a particular story caused them to write the book, "Probably," one author said, "because she kept him in my mind."

Jo Beverly says she got the idea of linking her sweet Regencies because "I'd thought for years that Georgette Heyer would be even more fun if her London was peopled by all the characters from the

books. So I began to plan a kind of 'world.' " Beverly doesn't find the structure limiting, because the links between the books can be almost anything.

While any spin-off involves the obvious problems of keeping your characters consistent and your details straight, the unplanned spin-off often has some other inherent problems. (I learned this in the hardest of ways when writing my book, *The Skypirate*, where I ended up trying to make the most unsympathetic female character I'd ever created into a heroine.) Author Harold Lowry, in the midst of his popular *Seven Brides* series writing as Leigh Greenwood, says that the

"Sometimes a character would just hang around in my head...I'd finally have to promise him an entire book to stop his nagging."

Annette Broadrick

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Every time I think about my career as a writer, I remember the story about the guy who ran off to join the circus. The only job he could get was cleaning up after the elephants, so for the next twenty years, he followed the elephants around with a giant pooper-scooper. And griped. And complained. And griped some more. Finally, somebody said, "If you don't like it, why don't you quit?" "What?" he replied indignantly. "And leave show business?"

I think that's the way most of us feel about writing. No matter how bad things get or how much we complain, we wouldn't really give it up for anything. This is one reason we organized Novelists, Inc. in the first place, so we could—yes, let's admit it!—have other people to complain to who would understand we really don't mean it because, crappy though it may be, we do love this business. The other reason for organizing NINC, of course, was to try to make this business a little less crappy. That's where my job as your new president begins.

I'm proud to say that I was a founding member of NINC. I was here in the beginning, so I know what our goals were then, and those goals haven't changed very much in the past six years. Back then we wanted NINC to become the definitive organization for writers of popular fiction, and we still do.

We've spent six years building NINC, and we had no trouble at all attracting the vast majority of published romance writers, but we've had less success attracting writers of other genres. We've made efforts to change that. Our last two presidents have been mystery writers, and this year's board sent out a mass mailing to 1300 mystery writers in an attempt to educate them about us. So far, we still haven't seen a large influx of new members from other genres. Plainly, we're going to have to do more.

This year's Nominating Committee selected a romance writer as president, and I'm not going to waste time apologizing for being a romance writer. Instead, I have developed a plan for the future of Novelists, Inc. that will benefit writers of all genres. My plan is based on my theory that when writers of other genres are invited to join NINC they ask themselves, "What can Novelists, Inc. do for me that another organization can't?" Until now, the answer to that question has been, "Not very much." That doesn't mean NINC isn't doing things for its members. We do lots of things, lots of very good things, but until now, we haven't been doing anything that other organizations aren't doing just as well or maybe even better.

What I propose is that we start doing things that no other organization is doing, and we've already begun work on several exciting new projects. We've instituted a Royalty Audit Lottery, the winner of which will be notified soon, and we will be announcing the results of that audit in a future issue of *NINK*. We're updating the Agent Survey, and in response to member suggestions, it will include even more information this time around. We have established an Internet address for NINC (NINC1989@aol.com) that our members can use to contact us quickly, and we have also established a Homepage and a Mailing List for instant updates [See article on page 13]. We have a committee looking at problem clauses

in agent contracts, and we are also addressing the very important issue of authors getting split checks directly from their publishers after they have fired an agent.

These are the projects already in the works, and the incoming board will be starting still more very soon. But we hope these are just the beginning. We want to see NINC go farther and do more, and to accomplish that goal, we need your help and your ideas. We want to know what you would like NINC to do for you and how we can help make this crazy business a little more writer-friendly. If you've got an idea or a suggestion, we'd like

to hear it. You may call me, write me, fax me or e-mail me (check the masthead to the left for the appropriate numbers), and I sincerely hope you will.

And when we have accomplished what we hope to accomplish, I believe that writers of all genres will flock to join us. Yes, I do believe that if we build it, they will come. And heck, even if we build it and they *don't* come, those of us who are already members will reap the benefits of what we have done. How can we lose?

— Victoria Thompson

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.

Hire Conference Planner

Like Brenda Hiatt Barber (Letter to the Editor last month), I greatly enjoyed the Denver conference, too. I didn't get the same impression of a conference "unabashedly romance-oriented," but I expect whatever impression you got depended on who you hung out with and what you talked about.

I did get another impression that's been forming since Atlanta that has nothing to do with genres or even writing per se: the impression the conference hotel makes on NINC members and, more important, on editors and agents. I may be in the minority, but the last two hotels did not impress me at all. From comments I heard, many of the invited industry professionals—used to four-star hotels—were even less impressed.

We want editors and agents to see NINC at the forefront of writers' organizations, a true mover-and-shaker, and us as high-performing achievers, and I honestly think NINC and we can make those claims, but they're hard to back up with a down-at-the-heels hotel where what is moving are the bugs and not the shower water in the tub and the toilet; smells—sewer, smoke, paint—are perform-

ing at peak while the vacuums and carpet cleaners clearly aren't, and hot water—with the occasional added attraction of cold—can't be achieved at all.

The Warwick offered one-legged turtle room service—when it was offered at all; there was none in the morning, meaning neither editors nor anyone else could get breakfast in their rooms. The number of bellmen was insufficient while there was no doorman at all; the latter is more than window-dressing when security is a concern or a cab is needed. Even one of the male agents commented on the general "ickiness" of the hotel.

Attending a NINC conference is a treat many of us give ourselves and the hotel should be a treat, too, nicer than our own houses; I don't think any one of us would enjoy a house like the last two conference hotels.

An unsuccessful hotel makes us look unsuccessful, too. Regional conferences I have attended used better hotels than our last two—with better prices yet!—because the sponsoring organization is local and has the time to scout out the best for the least and can also offer multi-year bookings to negotiate the price even lower.

It is completely unfair to expect our members who sacrifice working time to site our conferences to accomplish the same when they have only a day or two to visit an unfamiliar locale, examine a number of hotels, and try to determine what is affordable and meets our needs. That's asking too much and another strong reason why hiring a conference planner is such a good idea.

A professional planner knows hotel reputations, can tell at a glance whether a hotel has an adequate lobby with good "flow" and can barter other conference bookings to lower our rates. S/he will know in advance which hotels have several restaurants and the range of menus, prices and hours and not waste time even looking at ➔

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 3)

those with only one, limited in size and hours, which forces private meetings into hotel bars.

Along with hotel complaints, there was plenty of interest in Denver in having a conference in New York as soon as possible, and an increase in hotel cost seemed to be an acceptable trade-off for the prime location. This year's conference is sited in Baltimore—a city I happen to like very much—but we could change the location in the next few months without paying a penalty.

I think we should investigate asking a conference planner to see what kind of deal we could get in New York this year. Cost to NINC should be minimal with a possible maximum benefit.

A number of writers, editors and agents also made the suggestion that NINC consider picking a couple of permanent sites around the country, San Antonio being the location mentioned most after New York with somewhere on the West Coast as the third. Doing multi-year bookings could get us better prices as well as end the mad search every year for a new site.

We can and should have a hotel that isn't an embarrassment.

— **Patty Gardner Evans**

Collected Wisdom

Re: Karen Harper's Letter to the Editor in the December *Novelists' Ink*:

For the first time ever, there will be a central archival site for the romance genre. "Romance Fiction and Related Materials" will be housed in the Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, which currently has a mystery and a science fiction collection. While Romance Writers of America is heavily involved with the project, and indeed is donating much of its own organizational archival material, the collection is not limited to RWA members but is instead meant to include all published romance authors. I'm hoping that members of Novelists, Inc. will join in this milestone event for the romance genre and donate materials to this exciting collection.

In this first phase of collection development, the library is looking for materials from authors that "document the process of creation," as Head Librarian Alison Scott puts it. Examples would include line-edited manuscripts, copy-edited manuscripts and galleys for published romance novels. If you're interested in donating your material, please send it to:

Alison Scott, Head Librarian, Popular Culture Library, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green OH 43403.

The next phase will include author's personal corre-

spondence—so don't go throwing away any of your files! This material is invaluable primary research material which will be treated with the utmost care—maintained in an optimal, climate controlled environment and housed in archivally-appropriate folders.

But what if you're not ready to part with your treasures and donate them to this collection yet? Don't worry—there is another option. You may donate the material at any time in the future, or you may arrange to have it bestowed upon the library in your will, as part of the distribution of your estate. (For more information on an instrument of gift for your estate, send an SASE to me at PO Box 16, Westmont IL 60559.

— **Cathie Linz**

Ed. note: The Popular Culture Library will be profiled in a future issue of *NINK*.

Trashed Steel

As I recall, a few years ago the *New York Times Book Review* did review a Danielle Steel novel. Ellen Goodman trashed it.

— **Carla Neggers**

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

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

Jon Foyt, Santa Fe NM
Pamela E. Johnson (*Pamela Dalton*), Cottage Grove WI
Kathleen Pynn (*Kathleen O'Brien*), Maitland FL
Ruth S. Schmidt (*Lee Scofield*), Blue Springs MO
Lynne Smith (*Lynn Michaels*, *Paula Christopher*, *Jane Lynson*), Independence MO

New Members

Marcy Elias Rothman, Studio City CA

Browse Our Backlist

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Reprints of past articles are available for \$2/copy from NINC Central Coordinator Randy Russell, P.O. Box 1166, Mission KS 66222-0166

(Title of article, author, issue)

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Art of the Tax Form, Alexandra Steen, 10/95
Bet You Thought You Were In Books in Print/form, Amanda Scott, 8/95
Book By Its Cover, Laura Resnick
 I. Cover Karma, 9/95
 11. *Green Books Don't Sell*, 10/95
 III. *But I Wrote the Damn Thing*, 11/95
Book Distribution, Patricia Gardner Evans, 9/93
Book Publicity I & II, Randy Russell, 5/93, 6/93
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Life After Death: Losing Your Publishing Home, Judi Lind, 9/95
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The Spin-Off Zone

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biggest problem he sees is turning "characters who were originally meant to be basically secondary and one-dimensional into full-sized heroes and heroines." Several authors agreed that when doing an unplanned spin-off,

they often wished they could go back and change something in the first book, which would make the next book easier.

"I'd thought for years that Georgette Heyer would be even more fun if her London was peopled by all the characters from the books. So I began to plan a kind of 'world.'"

Jo Beverly

And there's that pesky problem of someone seeing a hero where you saw only an annoying character you thought you were through with.

Broadrick remembers being taken aback when both her editor and her agent urged her to write a story for a secondary character she hadn't particularly cared for. What was her response to their urging to find a happy ending for this attorney she saw as cold and unfeeling? "I thought I had," she says. "He could go back to his musty law books and continue his workaholic habits." Great supporting players, Broadrick adds, aren't always lead player material.

Fayrene Preston, currently working on her The Dameron Mark series, has found that she's sometimes "pulled something out of left field for the secondary character, not worrying about it because I didn't plan to write that character's story." Then, when she later decides to write the story, she finds herself trying to work that odd element into her book. "It can be hard," Preston says, "but in the end it simply makes the new book more unique."

Another writer says she had to decide if it was more important to be absolutely consistent with her character as established in the first book or to "tweak" him to fit better in his own book. At least one author has an even bigger problem; the story her readers are clamoring for is about a character who has been undeniably dead and buried since the first book! However, many writers enjoy the challenge; as Iris Johansen pointed out, sometimes those problems can be fun, and set the brain working.

One of the longest-awaited and most-demanded spin-offs, at least in the history of category publishing, was Linda Howington's (Howard) *Mackenzie's Mission*. Howington says she wasn't immediately ready, after *Mackenzie's Mountain*, to begin writing this book. In her mind, Joe Mackenzie was still young, and needed time to be-

come a man. Yet everyone wanted the book right now, "or sooner," she says.

"When I was ready to write the book, the pressure to make him special was almost crippling. I actually wrote two entire Joe Mackenzie books, but the first one wasn't good enough so I destroyed it. It was a killer of a decision to make, but I wasn't happy with the first effort. I hope I never have to do that again." Now *that* is having the courage of your convictions.

And some NINC members, being the honest bunch we are, admitted it was the tight market and the popularity of spin-offs that made them plan such a series of books.

Plan?

Yes, plan. While it was often the case that spin-offs were unplanned, inspired by secondary characters that fascinated the writer, or by reader requests, almost equally as often the series of connected books were planned from the beginning. Susan Macias, writing as Susan Mallery, is in the midst of her Hometown Heartbreakers series for Silhouette, in which the characters are linked by both family relationships and location. It had been originally planned as a five-book series, but has done so well it will now be six. Macias says the planned series was easier to do, because she knew in advance what she had to do for later books, and thus was able to better set up her situations.

Iris Johansen's Wind Dancer series, the only planned series Johansen has done, was linked by both family and a unique object common to all the books. Victoria (Hinze) Barrett's open-ended single-title series, Seascape, is linked by setting and recurring characters; the protagonists are always different, but often were secondary characters in a previous novel.

The series, which is being co-written by Barrett with author Rosalyn Alsobrook, is also linked in another rather unique way; the project was created on spec, entirely via the GENIE online service. Barrett and her writing partner had never met. The "bible" for the series was created via GENIE and then marketed. It sold quickly to St. Martin's Press, and the first book, *Beyond the Misty Shore*, will be out in March of 1996. "Continuity series are popular with readers, and it seemed creating such a single-title novel series would be a good investment—and fun," Barrett says.

When asked whether writing spin-offs was easier or more difficult than writing books with an entirely new cast of characters, the usual answer was perhaps predictable:

There's that pesky problem of someone seeing a hero where you saw only an annoying character you thought you were through with.

both. Deb Cooke, who writes historical novels as Claire Delacroix, says there can theoretically be less research to do, since she's already read a lot about the time period, but there is also the hazard of your conflicts becoming too similar. Many writers found that already knowing the characters made the writing easier. Harold Lowry points out, however, that this can also cause difficulties; sometimes, he says, he knew his characters "wouldn't do things which would have made a more popular book. People can get problematical when you know them too well."

With longer series, keeping track of the little details can become time-consuming; Carol Backus, writing her

"People can get problematical when you know them too well."

Harold Lowry

Lion series as Suzanne Barclay, developed a system of using 5x8 index cards to track the necessary details on characters, moving the cards from one story folder to the next so they

were always at hand and she didn't have to go back through an entire book to track down small details.

Linda Howington feels that, since she writes each book to stand alone, spin-offs are neither easier nor more difficult...except, of course, for the revered Mackenzies. Those are more difficult all around, "because reader expectation is so high." While Howington knows it's impossible to please everyone, she says "the pressure is still there—and mounting."

It's clear there are many reasons for doing spin-offs. But what about not doing them? Besides all the difficulties already shown here, authors reported varying reasons for their decisions not to write a specific book. Although she's not opposed to spin-offs, Jennifer Smith, who writes as Jennifer Crusie, says she's found that "books that have external births are so difficult for me to write that I abandon them; it's the books that come from ideas inside me that I have to write."

Writer Barbara Samuel, who writes as Ruth Wind, has gotten many requests for a book about a character from her book *Light of Day*, but has never done it "because it would have been too hard to make him sympathetic." She also declined to do a story about another secondary character, a "shrapnel-riddled Vietnam vet...I couldn't bear to write a whole book about a man in constant pain."

Fayrene Preston says she fell in love with one of her characters, Vanessa, from her SwanSea series. "She was one of the most intriguing characters I've ever written, but to this day I haven't been able to come up with a story line

that does her justice, and so I've simply had to forget it." And one practical NINC member is holding off on a requested spin-off until she sees what the earn-out is on the first book.

What about the publisher reaction to the seeming proliferation of spin-offs? Generally, the response seems to range from neutral—if the book is good, it doesn't matter if it's a spin-off or not—to highly enthusiastic, especially if the books were bought as a planned series. Some publishers are uncertain about how to handle these books; Jo Beverly says they see the point of accumulating a readership, but worry about frightening off readers who feel they've missed earlier books and therefore don't want to buy the current one yet.

Some publishers take full advantage of the fact that several books will be connected, developing special cover treatments and flashes to signal the reader, listing connected titles in the books and doing advertising in each book for the next. One author reported that her editor listed a cast of characters and noted which of them had appeared in the previous book.

Titles are often selected with highlighting the connection in mind as well; Lowry's *Seven Brides* all have flower names, adding to the recognition factor, and "Seven Brides" and a special logo are shown on all the covers.

Does this work? Does the connected-books concept itself work? Most of these writers think so. Backus reports that at book signings, where she has all of her connected titles available, many readers will buy all three when they find out they are a set. If there are any complaints, it seems to be about the wait between books.

There is also a drawback when dealing with category books; it makes it more difficult for a reader who comes into the sequence of spin-offs late to get all of the titles, which causes some irritation.

This is also a problem with the most popular single title releases, because if readers like the books, they don't want to give up any of the set, making them scarce even in used-book stores. Some publishers have resolved this in the obvious manner; reprinting the older, unavailable titles as new ones come out, but some don't seem to have caught on to this yet.

The consensus of the writers interviewed is that readers love spin-offs. Howington calls the reader reac- ➔

"I whimper every time I remember that Ann Maxwell isn't going to finish the Fire Dancer series.."

Linda Howington

The Spin-Off Zone

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tion "voracious." She also says she understands it, because "I whimper every time I remember that Ann Maxwell isn't going to finish the Fire Dancer series." (As do I.)

Only one author reported a negative reaction; her editor was very resistant to the idea of a spin-off, saying she didn't understand why so many others wanted to write them, because she was getting tired of seeing them and thought they didn't work well because it was so difficult to make the book stand alone.

"Most readers like spin-offs if the books also stand alone."

Iris Johansen

And here we have what most of these writers consider the single biggest caveat about spin-offs: Make sure your book can stand alone. Some of the newer writers report battling the tendency to assume the reader knows things already explained in a prior book. One stated that for the

first time she was having to ask an outsider to read her books precisely for that type of error. But there is another side to that problem; Barrett points out that "Finding a blend wherein the new reader is informed and the previous novel reader isn't bored is a challenge."

Johansen says, "Most readers like spin-offs if the books can also stand alone. But there are definite problems if the previous books are unavailable. I repeat, make sure they can stand alone." Good advice from a writer who knows whereof she speaks.

Almost all of the authors agreed on one thing—it was wonderful to know that their characters became so real to their readers that they wanted to know more; they wanted them to have their own story. It means you've reached your audience. It means you've touched your readers.

It means you've done your job. **NINK**

Jan has the Trinity West mini-series beginning in March from Silhouette and Heart of the Hawk from NAL/Topaz in April, both under the name Justine Davis.

From the Suggestion Box

Ed. note: This is a new feature that comes—where else—from the suggestions of several members. Members who, in their own words, "have ideas but not guts" and prefer to "hide in the bushes and lob grenades" to actual hand-to-hand combat. So, in the tradition of suggestion boxes everywhere, suggestions that could benefit the welfare of NINC members will be presented anonymously. Breaking with tradition, however, for obvious reasons, the suggestions must be signed when they are sent to the newsletter. Use the e-mail address or the newsletter USPS address or fax number—and start stuffing.

Some people are worried by the Harlequin moral rights clause and the new "split any liability" clause, fearing that changes to their manuscripts could possibly end up in a lawsuit directed at the author for something Harlequin abridged or altered without the author's permission or even knowledge, resulting in a work that no longer reflects what the author intended. And where Harlequin leads, who knows who else will follow? One way to protect oneself would be to keep the original, copy-edited manuscript to show that, although there may be a problem, it was not of the author's making. Because some publishers do not return copy-edited manuscripts, keeping the disk(s) on which the work was submitted is a protection. Keeping both when possible,

instead of tossing the paper or writing over the disk, is even better.

Discussion continues on the issue of agents collecting all of an author's money. The practice can be considered legally backward since the agent is the author's employee and, in any other situation, the one who does the hiring is the one who handles the money and pays commissions, etc. The author is also the one who signs the publishing contract, not the agent, and arguably should be the one taking payment. However, it is understandable that agents might not feel completely secure if authors receive all monies, and many authors don't want the hassle of increased bookkeeping, contract monitoring, etc. Split checks can resolve concerns on both sides, but agreement can be hard to come by. There is an alternative that provides authors with financial protection: a fidelity bond. The bond is not a simple solution. The bond would be supplied to the author by the agent, and, in order to obtain such a bond, the agent would have to demonstrate sufficient net worth to back up the bond. The bonds are not cheap and not easy to obtain and would seem to be an unnecessarily complicated and expensive solution to a problem for which there is a much simple, cost-free solution: Split the check.

A Book by Its Cover

IV: *Steal This Cover!*

By LAURA RESNICK

"In those days, publishers were open to new ideas because everything was new and untested. If a thing worked, they used it until it didn't work anymore and then went on to something else. Symbolic covers, interpretive covers,

"Marketing is not an exact science, yet people in sales tend to regard their beliefs as absolute fact."

Vincent Di Fate

History of SF Art in Paperback" (*SF Chronicle*, March/April 1995) occurred in the 1950s and 1960s; long ago and far away.

"Competition among mass market publishers is heating up for retail rack space," *Publishers Weekly* proclaimed in January of 1988. The article's title, "Mass Market Covers—Key Weapons in the Rack-Space War" (and its use of phrases like "biting the bullet" and "cutting edge"), conjures up images of Rambo and the Terminator squaring off in a battle for the last remaining rack space in some post-modernist hellhole.

"In addition to the growth of editorial control over our covers," science fiction artist Di Fate writes in his art history article, "the marketing people began to intrude into the process. Art directors, once among the most powerful people in the industry, were reduced in many cases to being part of a committee, or even just traffic managers overseeing the constant flow of artwork."

In November of 1989, *PW* featured another article on the changing world of cover art: "Mass market paperback publishers are continuing to innovate, spurred by an intensely competitive marketplace." (Indeed, I picture Spanish spurs, the sharp points of the rowels drawing blood.)

"If such things [as sales figures] were absolutely predictable," Di Fate writes in his *Chronicle* article, "no book would flop, no movie would go without an audience, no product manufactured would go unsold. Marketing is not

generic covers, literal, narrative covers—all coexisted in a field that was still too young and unsophisticated to appreciate the value of demographic studies or to be obsessed with a bottom-line marketing mentality."

This publishing Eden which Vincent Di Fate wistfully describes in "A Short

an exact science, yet people in sales tend to regard their beliefs as absolute fact."

In May of 1994, one of *PW*'s feature articles began: "With romance making up close to half of all mass market books sold, catching the attention of romance readers is both increasingly difficult and crucial." The article examines innovations in romance cover art, as well as ways in which publishers are trying to make their books automatically identifiable as romance while simultaneously trying to make them stand out from the pack. The article contains comments by editors, sales officers, promotions officers, associate publishers, deputy publishers, advertising executives, marketing directors, publicity directors, publicity managers, and...oh, yes, art directors. The science of "keying covers" to attract impulse buyers is explored, as well as the virtues of special gimmicks, the life and death of the notorious "clinch" cover, the male cover model as "a great marketing tool," and the "romance look of the future."

Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore.

America's corporate culture began invading publishing in the '70s, and to a large (and not unreasonable) extent, the big communication conglomerates which then began acquiring New York's major publishing houses are now blamed for the current state of affairs in publishing. "To such vast and highly profitable business operations," Di Fate points out, "the income from book publishing must seem abysmal." (It seems that way to quite a few writers, too.) Di Fate is not the first person to note that the conglomerates' "pressure to maximize profits from publishing may be founded on unrealistic expectations." (Indeed, didn't the banquet speaker at Novelists, Inc.'s first conference suggest the same thing?)

We all know (or fear) where this leaves us as writers; it's the subject of articles in every writers' trade journal and newsletter. But what does it mean to your book's cover?

If you remember only one thing from this series, remember this: next to word of mouth, the cover is the single most important way you reach new readers. Covers are, therefore, the area in which we see the most →

Next to word of mouth, the cover is the single most important way you reach new readers.

Steal This Cover

(Continued from page 9)

competition, the most rapid change and (apart from our own prose) the most innovation.

Joni Friedman, Art Director at Berkley Books, stresses that it is essential to learn during the initial cover conference who the target audience is so that all plans made thereafter can attempt to attract those consumers. As Harper's Gene Mydlowski says, "The cover must be representative of the type of book the

"Our research shows that the people in our bookclubs definitely prefer the clinch covers."

Steve Zacharius

reader thinks he's buying, so it must be fair, accurate advertising." Therefore, it must not only stand out in some way, it must also tell the reader—in that brief three-second glance—what type of book it is. Hence, each genre develops a "look."

As a professional writer who is no doubt also an avid reader, you're probably well aware of genre "looks." Indeed, if you see the cover of a mystery, western, fantasy, romance or science fiction novel and can't automatically identify it by genre (however special, innovative or unique the cover is), you know something's wrong. Even romance, with its rapidly changing look, remains identifiable as romance. Of course, just in case buyers, bookstore staff and consumers have doubts, the book's genre is usually helpfully printed on the spine. But the cover always attempts to help not only you, but also the occasional reader who has never even consciously acknowledged these signals, to instantly identify what *kind* of book is before you.

Since the majority of NINC's members are published in romance, I've chosen romance as the genre in which to explore the origin, effect and evolution of a genre "look." (By the way, I also recommend that readers specifically interested in the evolution of sf/f cover art read Di Fate's fascinating *SF Chronicle* article on the subject—in many ways a more complex subject, due to both the nature and the age of the genre.)

While no one I've interviewed has pinned down the exact origin of the romance genre's notorious and formerly ubiquitous "clinch" cover, certainly Zebra Books and cover artist Pino were instrumental in the success of this look in the early '80s, when the genre was growing almost faster than books could be released. The look—a lot of flesh and a passionate embrace—matched the trend of increasing sensuality *inside* the covers. An articulate and interesting man who will be featured in the final article in this series,

Pino is well aware that the clinch has fallen into disfavor with some people, but he points out that the look nonetheless helped the growth of the genre's sales during the 1980s, when romance rose to become the single biggest seller in mass market fiction. "Buyers liked the sensuality on the covers," Pino notes. And buyers, as discussed in a previous article in this series, are ultimately the people who decide if your book is going to get on the stands where consumers can see it.

There is, of course, a counter-argument which says that many readers are embarrassed to carry around a book whose cover portrays a half-naked couple locked in carnal embrace; an extension of this argument suggests that many readers who might like romance novels won't even consider buying one precisely *because* of this look. Most publishing professionals, however, believe that the genre's sales figures in the 1980s speak for themselves. Denise Little, a senior editor at Zebra Books who was a buyer for B.Dalton/Barnes & Noble during the 1980s says, "The clinch gave the genre a uniform, identifiable look which helped it emerge as a force in the late '70s and the '80s. Also, since most people selecting the books [by cover] and putting them into racks in grocery stores, truck stops, drug stores and so on were *men*, the 'look' helped get those books out there in huge numbers." Those outlets, Little adds, accounted for about 80% of the romance distribution network at one point, and while the look undoubtedly discouraged some readers, it nonetheless attracted many more. Most importantly, readers knew at a glance that the book was a romance novel.

The goal of genre identification was achieved with stunning success and, indeed, continues well into the '90s. Although Warner Books Creative Director

Jackie Meyer told *Publishers Weekly* in May of 1994 that "the clinch is dead," publishing executives from Avon and Leisure speak up for it in the same article. The clinch still instantly identifies the books of many new and midlist writers as romance novels (which may be, if you were wondering, why your cover gets one); and some publishers prefer to continue using a clinch even for (at least some of) their romance lead titles. Steve Zacharius, Kensington/Zebra's energetic Vice President and general manager, recently told *Novelists' Ink*: "Our research shows that the people in our bookclubs definitely prefer the clinch covers." Yook Louie, Bantam's courteous and articulate

People even walk into art departments with a cover that worked for another house and say, "Steal this cover!"

Art Director, believes the clinch will always be around. "It won't be on every cover," he says, "but it will continue to be part of the genre."

One now-familiar innovation which Louie mentions is the use of graphics or a still-life on the book's cover, with the clinch portrayed in a stepback illustration and/or on the spine of the book. As you may have noticed, stepbacks are comparatively rare outside of the romance genre. According to Steve Zacharius, "The stepback is more widely used in romance because there is the feeling that many women are embarrassed to be seen holding romance books with clinches." Therefore the clinch, still part of the genre's identity, is concealed in the inside cover. Yook Louie describes it as combining the new look with the old.

The high cost of stepbacks is another reason they're far more common in romance. Since, compared to other genres, the romance market is so big and print runs are so high, Louie explains, publishers know they're more likely to see an acceptable return on their investment when they put a stepback cover on a romance novel. However, Zacharius says that at Kensington, "We have seen no evidence that stepbacks perform better than the normal clinch cover. The buyers do not increase their buys, and the sell-throughs...are not any higher." He cites numerous examples where Kensington/Zebra has been able to discern this through their extensive publishing program, and concludes that, considering how high the cost of producing a stepback is, "that's a lot of money to spend without seeing any benefits." So perhaps stepbacks will become less prevalent in romance during the next few years.

Many romance writers, of course, have been vocal about objecting to clinch covers—or at least to the so-called "nursing mother" covers which many writers regard as particularly tasteless. But guess what? While your objections *may* have had an effect, not one single publishing professional mentions that as a factor in the genre's changing look. Not one.

So what *has* caused a change toward what many writers (and readers) consider more tasteful, attractive and even original packaging? Answer: competition, of course.

Naturally, publishers are well aware of what their competitors are doing, and they watch what succeeds and what fails in the marketplace. While everyone stresses the importance of good books, packaging (as *Publishers Weekly* keeps reminding us) is usually where the rack-space wars are won or lost. All publishers admit they are competitive with each other; it's the American way, after all. While most deny it, one publishing professional says that, in the flavor-of-the-month and do-it-again syndromes which permeate New York publishing, people even literally walk into art departments with a cover that worked for another house and say, "Steal this cover!" Yook Louie of Bantam Books, however, points out that the best policy is "to *outdo* a competitor's cover, not steal it."

The clinch, as we all know, wound up flooding the market. The look, as Berkley's Joni Friedman says, "got really tired." Or, as Gene Mydlowski told *Publishers Weekly*, "We created a monster with the clinch." When

Harper Paperbacks started up in the late '80s, Mydlowski purposely took a new approach to packaging the genre: "I'm going on the basis that the woman is approaching the rack because she's a 'professional' romance reader. If I can get one cover to stand away from all the rest, I've done my job." Since publishers' decisions (occasional evidence to the contrary) don't take place in a vacuum, more than one publishing house began experimenting around the same time, searching for a look which would say "romance!" without being identical to all the other romances on the stands.

This atmosphere of ever-increasing competition inspired even more innovation when something happened which completely changed the nature of marketing romance novels. While the superstores were rising to prominence as the chief outlet for many books, the romance genre's traditional primary outlets were simultaneously drying up. The grocery store, truck stop, drug store and other wire rack, non-bookstore outlets which had been the genre's mainstay suddenly discovered that they could make more money by stocking nothing but major bestsellers, the backlists of major bestsellers and lead titles. Midlist romance genre books simply weren't as profitable as this new cash cow. "Consequently," Denise Little explains, "There are almost no slots left in this market, and romance writers—except for bestsellers—have seen dramatic reductions in their print runs."

The upshot is that bookstores, including the superstores, have now become the romance genre's primary market. "The traditional '80s look of romance doesn't appeal to the buyers in this market," Little says. "It also doesn't appeal strongly to the consumers in this market. So a new look is *essential* for the success of the genre in this new structure, a look which will appeal to every layer of the process—sales force, buyers, store staff and readers." And *this*, to a very large extent, is what's influencing the changes we currently see taking place in the romance genre's covers; changes which not only reflect where the books are sold and how boldly they each need to stand out, but also which new readers must now be induced to pick up a romance novel—by making the cover is so arresting that they can't bear *not* to pick it up.

As publishers search for a new look, we're now seeing over half the novels in the romance genre being released with a variety of covers featuring flowers, jewelry, scenery, still-life objects which (presumably) represent an aspect of the story and models in poses besides the clinch. Many covers still feature an artist's illustration, but others are done strictly with graphics or a combination of photography and graphic design.

New technology is another factor in the genre's covers. Zebra Books in particular has experimented with →

"We created a monster with the clinch."

Gene Mydlowski

Steal This Cover

(Continued from page 11)

3-D covers and holograms, though this technology is still extremely expensive. "As we experiment more with these techniques, they will continue to improve," says Steve Zacharius. Pointing out the excellent sale figures on first-time author Mickie Madden's *Everlastin'*, he adds, "At the current time, we are negotiating to use this technique on three upcoming titles during the next year." In addition, "we are also experimenting with a new holographic foiling technique which allows the entire cover to be holographic foil... The technique is quite eye-catching and not nearly as costly as the lenticular [3-D] process."

The cost of the lenticular process is certainly one reason Tor Books hasn't experimented with it. While they might try it if the right book comes along, Tor's Art Director, Irene Gallo, is far more interested in improving design and conceptualization on covers than in "fancy effects." Some publishing professionals refer to these effects as "bells and whistles" and don't yet have much interest in pursuing them. Some even consider the effects unattractive, while others believe the novelty will soon wear off, ensuring that the substantial investment required will cease to be mitigated by good sales figures.

Bantam's (other) Art Director, Jamie Warren-Youll, doesn't anticipate exploring these expensive techniques any time soon. In her department, she jokes, "we still think foil is expensive." However, she talks at length about other innovative packaging which she, as Art Director for Bantam's mystery and sf/f releases, has overseen. A woman of refreshing enthusiasm—she actually *reads* most of the books which her department puts covers on—Warren-Youll's excitement is evident as she talks about the way the visual look of mysteries, in particular, is changing. She finds buyers and consumers to be—in the mystery genre, at least—open-minded and ready for "a curve ball." The covers, of course, also reflect the literary changes we've seen in the mystery genre; Warren-Youll notes the growth of the historical mystery as a major phenomenon which has provided opportunities for her to work with a "more painterly approach" on many covers (she mentions *The Dutchman* by Maan Meyers as a particularly good example). Her department has also worked with innovative photography techniques and computer art, and has experimented successfully with combining a traditional look with special effects on certain covers, such as Leslie Glass's *Hanging Time*.

Presumably, it will be several years before we know how much of an influence special effects, new technology

and increasingly competitive packaging will really have on our sales figures. Above all, most art directors seem to think that the look of mass market books—like everything else in our society—will keep changing and evolving. Who knows? One day someone's clinch cover may stand out by being the only one on the stands, thus attracting enough attention to turn some writer's midlist romance novel into a sensational success.

"So with all of this money, effort, thought and manpower going into covers," I hear you ask, "why is my last cover lifting its leg on fire hydrants?"

Don't think for a moment that I didn't ask!

Answers vary, of course. Some publishers deny that they've ever released a book with a bad cover; others nervously express hope that they never will. Some are more forthcoming. Yook Louie of Bantam Books points out that in some cases, your loathing of your cover may be a matter of individual taste. He explains that covers usually get vetoed in-house if they *aren't* good. After all, as agent Ruth Cohen says, "A bad cover doesn't help anybody." The publisher wants your book to sell; and, yes, your publisher even wants *you* to like the cover, though this isn't necessarily among their primary goals for it.

Thinking it over, Yook Louie adds that sometimes a cover simply doesn't look right—perhaps the art department started off with the wrong concept or the wrong artist. So the designers re-touch it and re-work it. In some cases, they end up with a much-improved cover. "In other cases," Louie concludes, "the cover risks ending up *overworked*." Another art director admits that, considering how many covers he puts out every month, no matter how hard his department tries, there's bound to be a dog now and then.

I remember author Susan Sontag once saying in an interview that she thinks every writer is entitled to a bad book now and then. If so, then I suppose the same is true of art directors and covers—as long as it's not *my* cover, buddy!

P.S. Special Bonus Post Script to this Article

Everyone I particularly asked about the fad of the male-cover-model-as-star seems to think this is indeed just a fad, and one that's on its way out. A thousand acerbic comments come to mind, and my pen almost drips vitriol, so I will say no more on the subject. **NINK**

"So with all of this money, effort, thought and manpower going into covers, why is my last cover lifting its leg on fire hydrants?"

NINC on the Net

It's here! As promised, Novelists, Inc. now has an Internet presence, with both a home page on the World Wide Web and its own e-mail mailing list for the direct exchange of messages and information by members.

As the cybernauts among you already know, a home page is the equivalent of an interactive billboard in cyberspace. The NINC page is designed to provide prospective members with information about the organization and persuade them to join. It provides information about the organization, members' quotes extolling NINC's virtues, an invitation from our new President, and sample articles from past newsletters. Best of all, the home page has an online membership application which cybersurfers can print, complete and mail.

Many of our members already have home pages to give themselves and their work a Net presence. I'm planning an area in the NINC domain (currently "under construction") which would provide information about our members with two-way links to their home pages. In other words, link to us and we'll link to you. Those who have home pages, please send me the Web address with a short author bio and, if you can, a photo (graphics can liven up a home page). Send me the stuff, and I'll do the rest. Once this section is up and running, we can use the home page to promote the organization and our members as well.

Ready to check out the NINC Web site? The address is <http://www.ninc.com> (no period at the end).

And that leads us to the topic I'm even more excited about—the NINC mailing list. I think this feature has the potential to be the greatest networking tool NINC has ever provided. Those who have not gone online sometimes don't understand the ease of sending e-mail, or the convenience of receiving messages via a mailing list. Believe me, it's wonderful. Your long distance bills will decrease, and you may never buy stamps again.

The mailing list allows us to exchange messages with members who have subscribed to the list. The advantages of the list are: (1) You don't have to subscribe to a particular (or any) commercial online service; any Internet access is sufficient; (2) It's virtually cost-free (cyber-mailboxes can be downloaded in seconds); (3) You don't have to go to a bulletin board or chat room hunting for the latest messages, they come to you; (4) We will restrict membership; only NINC members will receive the list; and (5) Replying to a message is easy. In most mailbox programs, a single click of the mouse will send your message to the mailing list server, which will distribute it to every subscriber.

Personal replies are also possible, and only require a few clicks more.

How do you subscribe? Again, it's a cinch. Send an

e-mail message to: maillist@tulsaweb.com (no period at the end). The subject line should read: subscribe nincnews (first name) (last name). For instance, I would send the subject line: subscribe nincnews William Bernhardt (no period at the end). It doesn't matter what you put in the body of the message. After subscribing, when you want to post a message to the entire mailing list, send it to the same address with the subject line: submit nincnews (title). A subject line might read: submit nincnews Aren't Publishers Scum? The body of the message would contain whatever you want to say. Pretty easy, huh?

Message traffic may be slow at first, but I'm hoping it will increase over time as we wean more of you off GENie and other high-cost non-exclusive forums. You can receive the NINC messages individually, or in digest form, meaning all the day's messages arrive in one file. As the volume of messages increases, you may want to switch to that option.

If you don't have a mailbox program, they are easy to acquire. The February issue will include a partial list of access providers.

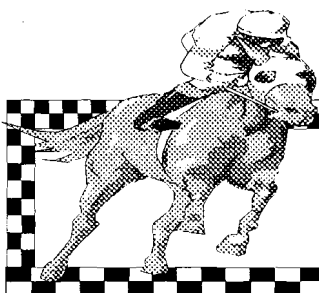
I hope you will give this a try. Check out the Web page, and by all means, subscribe to the mailing list. If you don't like it, it's easy to unsubscribe. But I'm betting the advantages and benefits and *fun* of it will be apparent as soon as you're online.

If you have any suggestions or thoughts on how I can improve NINC's online presence, or any ideas for additional features or improvements to the Web page or mailing list, please let me know. My e-mail address is: us009190@interramp.com (no period at end). I think my snail mail address is still functioning, such as it is.

— William Bernhardt

Dues Still Due?

It's been rumored that Central Coordinator Randy Russell spent a quiet New Year's Eve so he'd be alert and ready for the deluge of annual dues descending on him from January 1 - 15. We can hardly allow Randy's sacrifice to go in vain. Dues are \$50, unless you somehow miss that January 15 deadline, and then a \$10 late fee is assessed. An additional \$10 is required of non-U.S. members to cover the increased postage.



NINC Members on the USA Today List

The Fast Track

This two-month roundup initiates a *Novelists' Ink* monthly report on Novelists, Inc. members on the *USA Today* top 150 bestseller list. (A letter "n" after the position indicates that the title is new on the list that week.)

Members should send Carole Nelson

Douglas a postcard alerting her to upcoming books, especially those in multi-author anthologies, which are often listed by last names only. Internet surfers can read and retrieve the list with this magic formula: 1. Enter the World Wide Web via this address: <http://www.usatoday.com> 2. At *USA Today's* homepage, click on the purple "Life" button in the *USA Today* masthead. Once in the Life section, click on the purple "Books" button in that masthead to go to the bookpage. Click in turn on two blue entry lines to see the top 1-50 list and the next 51-150 titles. You can also access year-to-date bestsellers by category. Save or print out the file. Look for your name or those of your friends, and track the stars!

Member	Title	8 Oct	15 Oct	22 Oct	29 Oct	5 Nov	12 Nov	19 Nov	24 Nov
Mary Balogh, Jo Beverly, Edith Layton	<i>A Regency Christmas</i>			119 new!	93	110			
Sandra Brown	<i>Heaven's Price</i>					136n	59	123	
Stella Cameron	<i>Bride</i>							97n	
Elaine Coffman	<i>When Love Comes Along</i>		118n						
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Duke</i>	10n	11	23	27	50	97		
Jude Deveraux	<i>The Heiress</i>						52n	7	17
Shannon Drake	<i>No Other Man</i>		112n	46	52	89			
Patricia Gardner Evans, Jennifer Greene	<i>Santa's Little Helpers</i>			170	51	52			
Phyllis Halldorson	<i>The Bride and the Baby</i>						117n		
Kristin Hannah	<i>Waiting for the Moon</i>	146n	67	115					
Linda Howard	<i>After the Night</i>						72n	19	41
Susan Johnson	<i>Brazen</i>	69n	40	104					
Betina Krahn	<i>The Perfect Mistress</i>	63							
Jill Marie Landis	<i>Last Chance</i>					143n	44	70	
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>A Woman Without Lies</i>						100n	25	42
Debbie Macomber	<i>Touched by Angels</i>		94n	44	44				
Anne McCaffrey	<i>The Dolphins of Pern</i>	114n	24	30	34	48	83	130	150
Judith McNaught, Jude Deveraux, Kimberly Kates, Andrea Kane, Judith O'Brien	<i>A Gift of Love</i>	110 new!	110	125					
Linda Lael Miller	<i>Time Without End</i>		76n	27	43	86			
Diana Palmer	<i>Maggie's Dad</i>		48n						
Diana Palmer	<i>Friends and Lovers</i>						94n		
Karen Robards	<i>Walking After Midnight</i>		79n	28	31	58	129		
Nora Roberts	<i>The Pride of Jared MacKade</i>					93n	40		
Sherryl Woods	<i>A Christmas Blessing</i>						104n		

Denver Conference Reports — Part II

Continuation of Reports

Discussion Group Reports

Marketing Decisions at Publishers' Level

How publishers decide to spend their promotional resources...and on *whom*...was a hot-button topic. The overflow crowd listened attentively as publishers, editors and agents presented and defended their side of the issues.

Everyone believes that the industry is "soft" at the moment, and writers are struggling for attention. But the decision to promote select titles or authors seems based on the gut feelings of publishers; someone who's gotten a large advance or if the book is felt to be very commercial.

It was said that publishers used to nurture a writer, but support is now guided by sell-through of a writer's last book. Authors are finding that they must be innovative and self-involved, i.e. spend their own monies, to get the word out about their titles.

Print runs seem to be decided by the last minute throw of a dart, or on what one publisher suggested was the "goose-bump phenomenon" or "must have" reaction to a book. Someone called it "perceived value."

The answers and bottom line may not have been completely satisfying, but the exchange was open and the dialogue will continue. Someone suggested that better communications might help the level of frustration that authors often feel about what's being done for their books. Perceptions may be skewed by self-interest, be it the publishers' or ours. Reasonable levels of expectations might help to stave off anxiety.

— Sandra Kitt

The State of Publishing

No one had anything very good to report on the current state of publishing. Most of the publishers present agreed, however, that the current problem with backlist titles taking all the midlist rack space is a temporary problem. Lynn Brown of Kensington believes that within two years the situation will be resolved when the cache of sellable backlist titles is exhausted.

Most publishers also believe that the problem of superstores not carrying the large romance inventories will be resolved within the next few years. They feel that the superstores are still evolving and refining their inventory, and they will eventually determine that romance is a profitable project. Members suggested using local writers' groups to put pressure on individual stores.

Candy Lee mentioned that while Harlequin/Silhouette is still buying many new authors and has devised a

plan for promoting them, they are still uncertain of how to continue to build these authors. She asked for suggestions on how to promote authors with two to five books. Publishers reported that Horror is a dying genre, but that Mystery seems to be enjoying a revival in both quality and quantity.

— Victoria Thompson

Nuts and Bolts—How Publishing Works

Our group was small (people kept stealing our chairs) and the tone of discussion both friendly and informal, which was a great relief to me as a first-time moderator. Most of the group's concern seemed to be about whether and how an author can affect his/her own book sales. Items brought to the table for discussion included:

Self-promotion—What are publishers' attitudes? Does it help? Some conclusions and suggestions from Elisa Wares (Fawcett Books): Local promo *does* help. Surprisingly, publishers do notice the "bump" in sales in local areas. Also, promo ideas such as postcards should be presented through the editor rather than directly to publicity or marketing. It was also mentioned that publishers of series romance often *discourage* self-promotion, because they prefer to market the line as a whole.

Book signings—pros and cons. Some suggestions for successful signings: Giveaways, prize drawings, having your friends and relatives show up in force, serving refreshments, "hawking" your books and doing tarot card readings!

Cover horror stories—One conclusion: a bad cover probably doesn't hurt an established author, but definitely can derail a new career.

Hardcover vs. paperback sales—one conclusion: coming out in hardcover is probably best after a name has been built up in paperback. Less risk of falling flat and thus discouraging future hardcover plans.

The final item of the hour had to do with self-promo via the Net, a subject of so much interest to all present that it probably deserves its own panel discussion at the next conference. It would be especially helpful to those like me who still need to ask what a.o.l. means!

— Kathleen Creighton

Defining Historical Romance in the Nineties

The discussion group consisted of a whole batch of authors seasoned with a smattering of agents and editors.

Questions discussed were the same ones authors have been asking for years, and the answers ➔

Denver Conference Reports Continued

(Continued from page 15)

—most of them, at least—were also the same ones we've gotten for years:

Is anyone buying this? Yes. The current market has room for new talent, mostly in the form of established authors who are changing houses. None of the publishing houses are on a desperate buying spree right now.

What time period is the most successful in today's market? Nineteenth century America and Regency England. Off the wall periods are a hard sell unless the author is very established. Don't write to trends. They are too fleeting.

How hard is it for an author to switch from one category to another? Authors have been told by their publishers that a switch from contemporary or Regency to historical means they will have to start over as far as ad-

vances and placement on the list, because the author is moving into a different market and often looking at very different numbers. An author's past publishing accomplishments are not forgotten in the marketing of a book, however.

What are readers looking for in an historical hero? About the same thing they've always looked for. No wimps allowed.

How about paranormal elements in historical? The paranormal trend has not become as popular as authors and publishers thought it might, but can still be a story element.

What is the effect of covers? Clinches versus flowers and bosoms versus soaring birds. Some readers like the traditional covers, others want something less explicit. No one agrees.

— Emily Krokosz

The questionnaire for NINC's 1996 *Guide to Agents* is bound into this newsletter. **Even if you are currently unagented**, there are questions on the final survey page you may wish to answer. **But please put your name on it and return it even if you choose not to fill it out.** A few weeks from now, we will be sending reminder postcards to the members we haven't yet heard from. Your prompt reply will save us volunteer time, and printing and postage costs. Thanks for your cooperation!

Coming in February

When to Audit your Publisher

Ethan Ellenberg Answers the Tough Questions

What the AAR Thinks You Should Ask Your Agent

Who Are the Top Cover Artists and Why?

Evan Maxwell's East of the Hudson

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