

Novelists' Ink

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

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The Author-Agent Bond: *Breaking Up is Hard to Do*

Relationships, whether man to man, friend to friend or agent to author, can be wonderful. But, like the song says, they can also be difficult to maintain, disappointing to watch disintegrate and devastating when it becomes necessary to sever the ties that bind.

Most of us enter into these relationships with high hopes, mutual respect and perhaps unrealistic visions of merrily strolling down the yellow brick road together arm in arm far into the future. To the author-agent mix add a healthy dose of professionalism, and you've got the makings of a dynamic duo.

Certainly many authors have been known to wax poetic over their agents. On the acknowledgment page of his thrilling courtroom drama, *Eyes of a Child*, Richard North Patterson say this of his agent, Fred Hill: "He is what writers, at their most idealistic, hope an agent will be—a discerning reader, a supportive friend and a superlative mediator between writer and publisher." That undoubtedly matches most wish lists.

But what if suddenly the honeymoon is abruptly over? Or, in some cases, what if a long and valued relationship begins to turn sour? What if the alliance starts to deteriorate,

by
PAT WARREN

moving toward a separation neither had anticipated at the beginning? As with a marriage that no longer seems made in heaven, many factors, especially in an ever-tightening market, are involved in sowing the seeds of discontent.

Because questions on this subject come up frequently, *NINK* decided to explore the topic by polling several agents and authors. The question put to them was: If divorce is inescapable, how would you wish the other party to handle the break? Some of their answers may surprise you.

"Everybody's a coward when it comes to breaking up," said New York agent Ethan Ellenberg, who then went on to explain that notification by phone is a real shocker, which is why most clients prefer a letter or fax.

Prolific author Dallas Schulze agrees. "If an agent is going to dump me, I'd prefer a letter. Besides sheer cowardice, it's kinder. It gives the person time to regroup, to react in private first."

But another author disagrees. "On the phone, definitely," Carla Neggers insisted. "It's okay to follow up with a letter, but a call initially is what I'd choose, if both parties can be calm and professional." And that is a big *if*. By phone is the way Carla would handle the break if it were the other way around as well.

"A registered letter is the way a majority of authors handle the situation," stated agent Ruth Cohen, "though it would be far nicer to receive a phone call first and discuss any problems. However, since most have made their decision already, they dislike calling in person."

From the Curtis Brown Agency, Maureen Walters says she resents a formal faxed letter, labeling it far too cold and impersonal. "I prefer a phone (continued on page 7)

"Everybody's a coward when it comes to breaking up."

Ethan Ellenberg, agent

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

WE'RE HAVING A SALE!

I read somewhere that the above announcement is the surest way to get somebody's attention, and since you're reading this, I guess it worked. Actually, we really are having a sale, or perhaps I should say more correctly that we now have new, lower everyday low prices on two very important items: the NINC membership application fee and the subscription rate for the newsletter.

The Subscription Rate. How many times have you wished your editor and/or your agent received *NINK* so s/he would see a particular article? And how many times have you actually taken the trouble to copy that article and send it to them? Although *NINK* is intended for the edification of our members, we also know that the information we provide could be helpful to other professionals in the industry, too. The better educated they are, the better for us, right? And the more they know about NINC and the work we are doing for writers, the more they will respect us. That respect will translate into other benefits for us, such as their attending our conferences and cooperating with us when we ask for that cooperation (such as on the issue of split checks for authors, which is only one of the projects we're currently pursuing).

But in order for these other industry professionals to know about us, they must see *NINK*, and currently our \$50 subscription rate has kept all but a handful from subscribing. To remedy that, the NINC board has lowered the subscription rate to *NINK* for editors and agents to \$35, which is our cost of producing it. The definition of "agent" and "editor" will be strictly interpreted to prevent dilettantes from taking advantage of us, and of course a subscription to *NINK* does not carry any of the other benefits or rights of membership, so we don't have to worry about subscribers taking over the newsletter with their opinions and demands.

So make sure your editor and agent know about the change, and if you were looking for a gift for either of them, consider a gift subscription to *NINK*. It might be the biggest favor you ever did yourself and your career.

New Member Application Fee. We have also lowered the new member application fee from \$25 to \$10, retroactive to January 1. The reason for this should be obvious, since it lowers the cost of joining NINC from \$75 to \$60 and will, we hope, encourage more people to join. If you have a friend who has been hesitating, please give them a nudge and mention the new fee structure.

NEW PROJECT: DISABILITY CLAIMS FOR WRITERS

We are organizing a committee to investigate the problems and successes writers have had in purchasing disability insurance and in making claims. If you have any experience in this area—good or bad—please let us know (write, call, fax or e-mail; addresses on the masthead). ➔

This Month from the President:

- WE'RE HAVING A SALE
(Really!)
- DISABILITY INSURANCE
FOR WRITERS—We Need
Your Help
- SURREAL EXPERIENCE #1

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL DEPARTMENT:

I recently had one of those surreal experiences that only happens to writers. In early February, my husband had to have emergency open heart surgery for an aortic aneurysm. The surgeon who operated on him turned out to be none other than the surgeon who had helped me research one of my books almost exactly a year earlier. I was glad I'd done the research, because I happened to know he was one of the best heart surgeons in the country, just the man you'd want to entrust with your loved one's life. I'm happy to report that trust was not misplaced and my husband came through fine and is recov-

ering rapidly and completely, but my outlook on life has undergone a dramatic change. I don't answer the phone during meals anymore. And I don't sweat the small stuff. And I've decided that life is too short not to delegate. Just a warning to all of you potential volunteers out there!

— **Victoria Thompson**

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

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. Letters may be sent to the NINK editor via mail, fax or e-mail. See masthead for addresses.

He Likes It

The February issue of NINK is terrific! A truly sparkling issue—like this one—makes it very easy to attract new members to our organization and makes me very pleased to be an active member of NINC.

I'd love to see more information on contracts and audits from Paul Rosenzweig. This article was fascinating, although he seemed at times to be showing us only the tip

of the iceberg. (Unlike Clive Cussler's brilliant work, my career—and not my titles—has *Titanic* written all over it. But never fear—our salvage mission is nearly complete.) Could Mr. Rosenzweig be enticed to write for us again? And again?

Laura Resnick and Janice Young Brooks provided us with perfectly balanced approaches to using (or being used by) our computers. Thank you. Thank you. Of course, Evan Maxwell's column (I vote to leave the title alone) was what we've come to expect from him: excellent commentary on life in the real world. And thank you.

— **Randy Russell**

And Should We Wear Green Visors?

After reading the very informative article "Questioning the Paymaster" by Paul Rosenzweig in the February issue of *Novelists' Ink*, I ran right out and bought the Lotus 1.2.3 Spreadsheet program. I installed it successfully. And then I pulled out a royalty statement, certain that all I had to do was transfer a few numbers and—voilà—I would have all the data I would ever need to track, analyze and compare my books' sales figures. Silly me. →

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 3)

After two frustrating, non-productive, hair-pulling hours I had to admit failure. Not only did I not know how to set up a spread sheet system, I wasn't even sure exactly what I was supposed to be tracking!

I know I can't be the only writer with this problem. (Please tell me I'm not!) Which leads to the reason for this letter: Has anyone in NINC actually set up a spread sheet system for tracking royalties? Could someone write an article or give a workshop on this subject? Is there a book available that could take a math-impaired writer slowly and gently through the procedure, preferably step by step? Help!

— Candace Schuler

Ed. Note: Anyone who would be willing to write an article explaining this process please contact me.

Salting the Clouds

Re: Evan Maxwell's column on what to do with foreign translations. Sending extra copies to needy libraries is a great idea. Not intending to take away from the needy, I have another possibility to suggest, in case you've got an overseas trip in your future. Last May I was fortunate enough to go to Italy, traveling from Milan to Venice to Rome and points in between. Having copies of an Italian translation of *A Love so Wild* (they called it *La Gatta*), I crammed them in my backpack and visited bookstores along the way. Once the booksellers understood I was the author of the book being donated (I speak very little Italian), they were very responsive, saying they would order more. That sounded great, but having been bruised a few times in the U.S. publishing world and remembering the '92 Italian copyright, I went on my way grateful for the enthusiasm but doubtful anything would come of it.

Yesterday I received from my agent second edition copies of *La Gatta*, this time formatted in big-book size, the price higher, I Grandi Bestsellers on the cover, my name displayed across the top instead of modestly placed at the bottom. Now I'm not saying my visits had anything to do with it, but I toured in May and the 2nd edition came out in August. My agent says it's possible the two are connected.

— Evelyn Rogers

Angry Working Writers, Unite!

A National Writers Union representative recently commented in the *Washington Post* about the Joan Collins court case. To quote from that article: "By allowing publishers to recoup their advance payments, either immediately or in some cases after the work has been resold to another house, the satisfactory-manuscript provision takes the risk out of book publishing.... The reason publishing houses have

been able to get away with this practice is that they are much better organized than authors."

Publishers aren't the only ones who are better organized. When it comes to lobbying groups, actors are more organized and better protected than authors—something I learned recently when I went with Robert Gottlieb at William Morris Agency. It seems the Actors Guild has by-laws that no agency can charge an actor more than a ten percent commission. Because William Morris also represents many actors, they cannot charge authors more than they charge actors. This is one instance where I am thankful to ride on another's coattails.

What a pity it is that our writers' organizations don't have the power and/or clout to lobby for such rights for authors. I refuse to believe New York publishers are more powerful than Hollywood moguls.

There are a lot of angry groups in the world right now, and I suggest we borrow a phrase from one of them and endeavor to become "angry working authors." Before we can change the way publishing contracts read, we will have to change our accepting, complacent attitudes toward them. Granted, not many of us could take on a major publisher as Joan Collins did, but as a group we have tremendous power.

The author of this article wrote, "In the wake of the Collins verdict, publishing industry executives are reported to be worried that other authors will seek a similar change." Wouldn't it be wonderful if that was a legitimate concern?

— Elaine Coffman

Not Everyone's a Deveraux

The article by Jude Deveraux in the March newsletter (Do you really need an agent?) was most interesting. She had a lot of good and useful things to say, and I'm sure all of it is true. For Jude Deveraux. However, she's hardly typical of the Novelists, Inc. general membership. Her very first book hit the *New York Times* list, as have the 20 that followed, and she's worked for the same house all these years. How many of us can say that?

Naturally, Pocket Books willingly and happily negotiates her contracts with her. I heard Ms. Deveraux speak once, and she mentioned that her publisher flies her into New York and sends a limo for her so they can discuss the details. I don't know about you, but I'm not quite there. The article seems to imply that if you're strong-minded, fairly bright and can separate love from business, you don't need an agent. Which seems to indicate that the rest of us (without the aforementioned 21 bestsellers to our names, of course), must be timid, fearful, not so bright and looking for love in all the wrong places. Indeed, many authors I know would love nothing better than to find a house that publishes their books well so they can build a reputation with that house. Yet how many of even the biggest names are still with their original house? Not all of us are as tal-

ented, confident and secure as Ms. Deveraux, which is why we wind up paying 15 percent of everything to an agent, certain they can do a better job than we can.

It's not that I'm championing agents here. That's a personal decision. However, I do feel that the Jude Deveraux, Catherine Coulters, Nora Robertses and LaVyrle Spencers of the world have that extra measure of clout that has a publishing house acquiescing to their wishes in order not to lose them.

— *Name Withheld*

Of Shamrocks and Taxes

Since my husband and I are moving to Ireland next year, I found Anne McCaffrey's article on writers living in that country interesting and timely. And although everyone's situation is unique, I've learned a few basic things during these planning stages I thought I'd pass on to anyone else considering such a move.

In order to qualify for the foreign earned income exclusion, you must meet either the bona fide residence test—which requires you to have a tax home in a foreign country and be a bona fide resident of a foreign country for an uninterrupted period that includes an entire tax year—or the physical present test, requiring you to be physically present in a foreign country 330 full days during a period of 12 consecutive months. The 330 qualifying days do not have to be consecutive and you're allowed to keep a dwelling in the U.S., so long as your tax residence is in the foreign country.

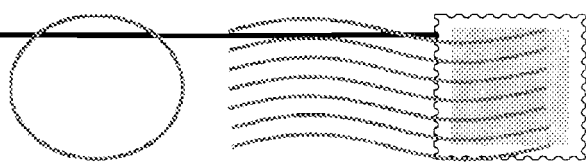
And, since it's possible for a married couple who qualify to exclude \$140,000 (as of this tax year), you may want to consider making your spouse part of your business to take advantage of the higher exclusion.

— *JoAnn Ross*

The Disappearing Middle

I'm glad to be a member of an organization committed to the business of writing and selling popular fiction, and I am aware that the strength of Novelists, Inc. derives in large part from the high professional profiles of so many of our members. The new "Fast Track" page in the newsletter rightly celebrates the achievement and status of these members, and I find it both enjoyable and inspiring to see on this page the name of writers I know and admire.

At the same time, I believe this "Fast Track" page obliquely indicates a less happy trend that has affected multiple-published writers in the past few years, namely: either you've achieved (or are slated for) bestseller status or you're an also-ran. In other words, the middle ground for writers seems to have vanished—along with every other economic "middle," including middle management and the middle class (but that's the subject of a different



letter). That is, as far as I can tell, *and I would truly like someone to correct me if I am wrong*, either you're receiving many-digit advances or you're doing piece-work that is likely, in the not-too-distant future, to be paid at a flat rate, no royalties. Another way of putting this is: it's a winner-take-all economy, and either you win big or you simply lose. Either you have "hit the list" (or have been put in line to hit the list) or you're at the bottom of the heap. No middle tier in the publishing pyramid any more. No pyramid anymore, in fact. Only the polarized top and bottom.

Perhaps my vision of this skew is itself skewed. (I would be happy if this were the case.) Perhaps I have misread the signs, or perhaps I have missed the articles that describe successful writing careers that do not involve NYTBSAs. Now, obviously, sales figures count. This is business, after all, and the more sales, the better. As I said, the "Fast Track" page is useful and appropriate. Nevertheless, I am struck by the fact that we writers seem to have confused and conflated our definition of success with the publishers' demand for more and more sales.

Is there room for discussion of the status and future of the writers in our organization who are not now and may never be NYTBSAs? Is a reasonable livelihood still possible for the majority of our members in the current economic climate of the publishing industry? Am I the only one who believes that a disturbing trend has already occurred?

— *Julie Tetel Andresen*

Unspoiled But Agented

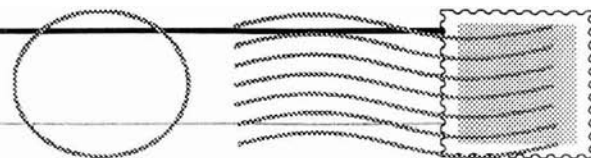
Jude Deveraux's level of success certainly proves that her career strategies work brilliantly—for *her*.

It has always seemed to me that one of the most perplexing aspects of a writing career—one that drives some people crazy—is that there is no easily defined path to success. There are many different possible goals for a writer, and even two writers who have absolutely identical goals will not achieve them in the same way or via the same path.

I've represented myself for 10 of my 15 book sales. I also had two brief, unsuccessful agent/author relationships before developing a very fruitful relationship with my current agent. So I've seen this issue from a number of different perspectives. Among other things, my experiences taught me that someone who is not a good agent for me may nonetheless be an excellent agent for someone else, and vice versa; I believe it is a very individual relationship.

I am indeed able to separate my "writing from the money." As a professional writer, that was one of the first lessons drummed into me by experience. I "know the business" reasonably well, and I am not ignorant of "how the royalty system works." I've got an agent who has far more complex goals than getting "as much money as possible now," and who has, in fact, been instrumental in teaching

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



me to take a long-term view of my work and career. If I ever “feel faint with envy” about someone else’s advances, then I get over it, just as I get over “jealousy”; I’m an adult and a professional, and I usually try to act like one. I “know how to read a contract.” I keep reference books on literary contracts for clauses I don’t immediately understand, and I have *never* been “shy about saying, ‘I don’t know what this means’” to my agent or my editors. Nor has my agent ever suggested that I’m not smart enough to decipher a contract without his help; but part of his job is certainly to answer any and all of my questions about my contracts. I am not in the habit of throwing “temper tantrums” or going “into rages.” I am not a “sulker or paranoid” and I do not require a “hand-holder.” And if my agent actually “pestered” me so much he destroyed my concentration, I’d tell him so. Fortunately, my conversations with my agent are productive and useful.

I’m not one to urge people to hire an agent, because I think there are more mediocre-to-bad agents out there than truly good ones, and because I think that even a very good one isn’t good for everyone—nor is an agent necessarily the right choice at every stage of a career.

However, my career took a big step forward after I hired the right person, at the right time, to be my professional advisor, negotiator and representative. My agent knows this volatile and varied marketplace better than I

do, even though I am not hopelessly ignorant about it. He deals with domestic and foreign markets for my work. He knows which editors at which houses would like—or are currently looking for—something like the proposal I’ve just handed him. He knows the creative intricacies of negotiating obscure particulars into increasingly complex contracts which take considerable time to agree upon *after* the major issues have been resolved. He acts as my advocate—in a variety of professional situations. He discusses long-term strategies with me as well as the long-and short-term ramifications of decisions I’m considering *and* of events which are beyond my control.

I consider these the specialized skills of a full-time professional, not something that I can pick up on the side after writing all day. And I find my agent, in the exercise of his skills and knowledge, to be well worth the commission I pay him.

Ms. Deveraux’s tremendous commercial success is clear evidence that her advice works wonderfully well for herself. However, what works for one writer doesn’t necessarily work for another. Although I am not a sulking, paranoid, tantrum-throwing, shy writer who doesn’t understand the business, I am nonetheless better off with my agent than without.

— **Laura Resnick**



In Search of a Wider View

Letters inviting editors, agents and publishers to this year’s conference have gone out. If I’ve overlooked your editor or agent, or if you know of someone we should invite, please let me know as soon as possible. And, by all means, let your editor and agent know you’re going to Baltimore.

I’ve been thinking a lot about the conference and what makes it unique, what makes it work. At its best, our conference brings together authors, editors, agents and publishers who are all willing—even eager—to share information, insights and perspectives about a business to which we are all dedicated.

We each look at books and publishing, at popular culture and popular fiction, through our own particular lens. At a Novelists, Inc. conference, we have the chance to see through a different lens. The lens of a

best-selling author, say. Or an eager, newly published author. Or an experienced agent. A talented editor. A publisher. Many of us come to NINC conferences for those fleeting moments of clarity and new understanding that come when we really are able to see an issue through a lens different from our own. These moments can be startling, even scary. But they’re also valuable, and, I believe, a not-to-be-missed opportunity in our shared mission of keeping popular fiction a vital and growing part of our popular culture.

So, October 17-20. Baltimore. Let’s come together: authors, agents, editors, publishers.

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Breaking Up is Hard to Do

(Continued from page 1)

conversation, later followed by a letter of confirmation."

"A letter is the best choice," Richard Curtis, author of *How to be Your Own Literary Agent*, commented, "unless there's a real possibility of reconciliation. In that case, a note requesting an in-person meeting would be better." However, the mere thought of face-to-face confrontation had most people I talked with backing off. Their reasons centered around logistics of time and distance often making a personal meeting impossible.

"If an agent is going to dump me, I'd prefer a letter."

Dallas Schulze, author

Not a one mentioned they simply couldn't handle sitting across from someone, looking them in the eye and firing them. Or be "fired" themselves. Yet some authors would definitely choose to go that route.

Sherryl Woods is one. "I'd want to hear the news in person, not by phone or mail, although the other two would be easier on the ego. I would need to know the reasons our relationship is no longer working. I feel I need a closure, not some cool, brisk letter, no matter how professional."

Ron Montana is another writer who opts for the personal meeting. "I'd prefer that the agent call and suggest lunch, then with tact and diplomacy lay out his reasons as to why he wants our relationship to end. And, I would hope we could part as friends. Sort of like an amicable divorce."

But is that even possible, considering the fragile egos involved? Author Barbara Keiler thinks so. "It is, after all, a business decision and should be handled as such. As professionally and as unemotionally as possible." She told me that her agent always wishes his soon-to-be ex-clients well and continues to buy their books. Small wonder she's stayed with him for some fourteen years.

"We all want to be treated the way we would handle them if the situation were reversed," Robyn Carr said, echoing the feelings of several other writers. She went on

"I'd want to hear the news in person."

Sherryl Woods, author

to outline what an agent who wanted to end things, but end them well, might say to an author. "I like you personally, but I don't have the enthusiasm

for your writing that I should have to best represent you. Although I don't personally care for your work, that doesn't mean there's anything wrong with it, and I wish you success." Robyn feels that that sort of answer leaves the author with her dignity intact.

Ron Montana teaches a Creative Writing class and gives this advice to his students: "An agent is your employee and should be terminated with the same respect and dignity as your housekeeper." However, he adds that when it's the author who instigates the break, the relationship usually ends less than amicably. Unfortunately, there appear to be more agents who find reasons to never again have contact with the writers who decided to leave the fold than agents who manage to retain the friendship.

The method used to deliver the bad news isn't nearly as important to some as is what is said and how it is said. "The agent should call and talk things over," writer Jill Marie Landis stated. "He should have a really good reason why they no longer can work together. But, finally, if the enthusiasm for your work is gone, why would you want them to represent you, anyway?"

Timing is also important. "Your agent should hear the news from you first, not second-hand," said agent Aaron Priest. "Be straight and up-front with him since he'll, of course, continue to represent you as agent of record on books already sold." It's inevitable that you'll have some future contact, so it's good to keep things pleasant. "Even though he may hate to lose you, the agent will bite the bullet and be nice about the split if your parting is amicable."

The question of surprise seemed to come up often. Do both writers and agents tend to ignore warning signs that the other half of the equation

may be less than thrilled with the current relationship? Does the restless party bring up real or imagined grievances to the other as they occur, or do they wait and let things accumulate, then perhaps fester until no bandage is big enough to cover the many sore points? And, finally, as with the wandering spouse, is the injured party the last to know?

"I'm rarely surprised when it happens," Maureen Walters told me. "The nature of the business is that when an author's career takes a nosedive, they need someone to blame." Like the team owner who fires the football coach after a poor season, the agent is the fall guy, the dispensable one. "As an agent friend said recently, 'One day I was Mr. Wonderful and the next day I was fired.' Certainly the author isn't going to jeopardize her career further by raging at the editor. So the agent gets the ax."

Do authors see it that way? "These are tough times for many writers," said Sherryl Woods. "I would hope no agent would abandon a once-successful author during a difficult time in her career. At the very least, if that should happen, they ought to recommend the writer to another agent and give her some direction."

"We all want to be treated the way we would handle them if the situation were reversed."

Robyn Carr, author



Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

(Continued from page 7)

Carla Neggers shares a similar view. "We all need to save face. A statement like, 'I don't feel I'm getting you to

"An agent is your employee and should be terminated with the same respect and dignity as your housekeeper."

Ron Montana, author

where you want to be,' can help a writer over a rough transition."

Ethan Ellenberg finds the situation disturbing "because the firing usually comes as a surprise.

Authors seldom let you know they're unhappy and, when you pin them down, they won't list specific grievances, just that 'it's time to move on.' This is self-defeating for, unless you're candid and upfront, you'll repeat the same problems with your new agent."

"The reasons authors leave," Ruth Cohen added, "are not usually lack of service or anything specific, but rather because they've heard that another agent is more powerful, more understanding, more accessible. Expectations are often based on stories heard from other authors, perhaps true, perhaps not."

Of course, we've all heard the horror stories, and, just as some marriages can't be mended, some author-agent relationships can't be fixed. "There are good and bad reasons to leave," Barbara Keiler acknowledged. "If the agent's ripped you off, if there are unexplained financial discrepancies, if action is never taken and calls only reluctantly returned, then, naturally, the break would be inevitable." In a large agency, some of these problems can be taken up with the firm's accountant, but in the smaller ones, the agent is likely your only contact.

Sherryl Woods outlined several reasons that most authors would find acceptable, should an agent wish to sever the relationship. "I've taken you as far as I can. Perhaps

"The agent will bite the bullet and be nice about the split if your parting is amicable."

Aaron Priest, agent

someone else may be better suited for Author X's experience in the marketplace."

It was generally agreed that many problems wouldn't get

out of hand or get to the separation stage as long as the lines of communication were kept open. Yet many thought that was difficult to achieve and even harder to maintain. Everyone concedes that no one enters into a relationship with an early or a bad ending in mind. Why, then, do so many end rather quickly and somewhat badly?

Nearly everyone I spoke with offered an opinion. Unreasonable expectations on both sides topped the list. The ups and downs of a crazy business. The pressure of deadlines. A sudden downward spiraling of a career that puts both parties on edge. An unfortunate misunderstanding.

A phone call missed, a letter lost, an appointment not kept. The agent who's not tough enough with editors and too tough on the writer. The author whose hat size grows way out of proportion to her success.

So many reasons, so few real answers.

So we return to the question, if parting is inevitable, how would we wish it to be handled? Perhaps it was best stated by Robin Kaigh, recently retired after twelve years as an agent: "At the first sign of unhappiness or unrest, I always wanted the authors to come to me *before* the point of no return and mention things that they're unhappy over, to let us decide if together we could work things out. However, if all efforts failed, I hoped we could part on friendly terms."

Personally, I've learned a great deal from talking with these wonderfully cooperative agents and authors. You've undoubtedly noticed that those interviewed are heavy hitters; yet these very busy people were unfailingly courteous, quick to return my calls and gave most generously of their time. Only one person declined to be interviewed even after I explained the question. I should probably mention that the opinions stated here are strictly those of the people interviewed, and not necessarily that of the editor, the author of this article or anyone on the Board.

Probably the most important thing I learned is that spending the day phoning around and gathering opinions goes to the top of my "Ways to Avoid Work" list. **NINK**

Pat Warren is the author of 40 novels. Her next release is *Beholden* from Warner Books due out in May, 1996.

"We all need to save face."

Carla Neggers, author

Kudos

The nominations for the prestigious AGATHA AWARD, given by Malice Domestic, include the following NINC members:

Best Novel—**Joan Hess**, *Miracles in Maggody*, Dutton

Best Short Story—**Dorothy Cannell**, "Cupid's Arrow," *Crimes of the Heart*, Berkley, and **Elizabeth Daniels Squire**, "The Dog Who Remembered Too Much," *Malice Domestic 4*, Pocket Books

Coming Soon: *Publishers Are from Mars, Writers Are from Venus; Preserving Popular Fiction for Posterity; Book-renting and Other Atrocities; Dispatches from the Front*

Uncovering Series Cover Strategy

By
JUDY E. CORSER

Walk into any store selling mass-market paperbacks and you're faced with a bewildering array. You've got five minutes to choose and they all look good. How does an art director use graphic elements to catch your interest? If you don't pick up the book for a closer look, it's no sale. Guaranteed.

With this article for *NINK* in mind, I visited our local bookstore with my son, age 12.

"Okay, Christian," I said to him. "Which books here do you think a guy would like to read?"

He eyeballed the huge display briefly and walked straight to the Mack Bolan Executioner series. "These ones."

I was stunned. Five or six seconds and the kid zeroes in on books aimed specifically at the male reader?

"Uh, why'd you pick those ones?" I ventured. "Was it something about the cover...?"

"The guns." He pointed to the gun in Mack's incredibly capable hands.

"What about the color? This red, for instance. I guess it means an explosion or something," I said hopefully, fishing for a more complex explanation of the series' appeal. "Dynamite?"

"Nope, the guns," he said. "That's what I saw right away."

Shelley Cinnamon, director of art services at Harlequin Books in Toronto, Ontario, who oversees the work of seven art buyers—five full-time and two part-time—and five in-house designers, likes this story.

"The art on the men's books is a much harder art form," Cinnamon says. "It tends to be much sharper and there's more attention to detail. Even the way it's been painted has a harder edge. And, yes, the guns certainly help to make it a little more male than a romantic cover."

"In fact, you'll see very little hardware on covers aimed at the female reader. It just doesn't work, although I did get a gun once on a historical cover," she continues. "I mean, if you had a heroine who worked in the construction business, for instance, you could show her in a hard hat, no problem, but you wouldn't have a bunch of heavy equipment in the background."

Cinnamon should know her business. As Harlequin's director of art services for the past 10 years, she is responsible for the production of over 70 covers per month, covers that go on Harlequin's seven romance lines—Love & Laughter will make eight in the fall of 1996, Silhouette's

five romance lines—including the new, mainstreamish-looking Yours Truly which debuted last August, Worldwide's mystery single titles (three retail titles per month), MIRA Books (two titles) and Gold Eagle, the men's action/adventure imprint. That imprint includes the ever-popular monthly Mack Bolan Executioner series, the Super Bolan books—four to six titles a year—and Deathlands, a "near future/fiction/post-Holocaust type of thing with continuing characters," according to Cinnamon. Deathlands accounts for another four to six titles a year.

All of which adds up to lots of work for the approximately 150 freelance artists employed by Harlequin, most in North America, who produce the cover paintings. The artists are paid outright for reproduction rights to their work and receive no royalties. In most cases, the painting remains the property of the artist.

So, with all those books, how is a series look created?

What tells the reader, or consumer in Harlequin parlance, that he or she is picking up a book that will deliver a certain read? After all, being able to count on the editorial content of a line is probably the single greatest reason for

"You'll see very little hardware on covers aimed at the female reader. It just doesn't work."

Shelley Cinnamon
Harlequin art director

the huge appeal and success of series books. A reader, who may not know one author from another—or at least didn't in the fairly recent past—will know that "I like those ones with the white covers." She is generally satisfied that those ones with the white covers—or red or blue—will deliver the read she wants.

The Mack Bolan Executioner series, Cinnamon notes, has made some changes over the past year or so, an attempt to go from a "heavily branded" white cover with blue and red lettering to a full-bleed art, more single title-ish look. Increased sales support the changes.

"Covers change all the time, what we call evolutionary change. It can be small things, just trying to keep them current, keep them contemporary, fresh-looking."

"Then we have revolutionary change which is dramatic or very, very different from where we had been with the series before to where we're going. Some of this can be driven through editorial because they've decided the line will take a new direction and we want to be able to tell our consumer that there is a radical change in →

Uncovering Series Cover Strategy

(Continued from page 9)

the way the editorial is being written or presented. What happened with Harlequin American a few years ago is a good example of that."

"We also do the covers here in Toronto for the Romance and Presents lines, which are edited in the U.K.," adds Cinnamon. "For those lines, we have a lot of input from the editorial department in London. And from marketing, of course."

"Branding" refers to how strongly or weakly the book on the retail shelf is perceived to be identified with a house or line.

Harlequin does a lot of marketing research. Task forces made up of ten-person teams from Harlequin's operations throughout North America, and sometimes throughout the

world, meet regularly to generate ideas for series, special promotions and covers. Each new cover or change in a series is carefully designed, researched and studied by focus groups before being released.

"The art varies a lot," Cinnamon says, "but we have very few photographic covers any more. We found that the consumer didn't find it as easy to fall into the fantasy—a photographic cover was just too realistic. We do use very realistic art, though. Our historicals tend to be more painterly although they still have a realism to the faces."

Any line—Superromance, for example—may undergo several changes over the course of a few years in an effort to find a look that reflects the content, a more mainstream read or, as senior editor Paula Eykelhof puts it, "The longer-book, series line with the most mainstream elements."

"We've gone through changes with Superromance over the past few years and that's to make the branding more contemporary," explains Cinnamon. "For a while we did Superromance with a turquoise stripe, then it had a red stripe down the side and now the stripe is gone and the branding is held solely at the top." According to Eykelhof, that stripe is again under discussion.

"Branding" refers to how strongly or weakly the book on the retail shelf is perceived to be identified with a house or line. All Silhouette books, with the exception of Yours Truly, are "heavily branded." The less heavily branded Yours Truly and the more heavily branded Love and Laughter lines, both short, sassy reads, are a bit of an experiment, according to Cinnamon, to see which line "grabs" the readers. Sales figures may mean cover adjustments in the future.

MIRA books, on the other hand, are designed to blend

in with other mainstream books and are difficult to recognize as a Harlequin product unless a consumer studies the book carefully. Even then, the MIRA "star" is prominent on the spine and the trademark Harlequin figure is conspicuously absent.

The market-driven thinking behind this kind of decision recognizes that a loyal romance reader will find the books, no matter what, and zero in on her favorite authors and favorite lines. The new reader, the one Harlequin hopes to attract, isn't always so easy to snag. And, face it, many book buyers still wouldn't be caught dead reading a book that so clearly shouted *romance novel*. These are the readers who will happily read a ten-year-old book by LaVyrle Spencer or Elizabeth Lowell and won't know the difference. Loyal readers might be enflamed—and they usually are—when they realize they've purchased a repackaged series book that they read years ago, but the new consumer, the one Harlequin hopes to attract, won't care.

Often what shapes the look of a line will be editorially driven, according to Cinnamon and Katherine Orr, vice president of public relations at Harlequin. A great deal is done through sophisticated marketing techniques which sample readers' preferences. Some, though, is just pure, dumb luck.

Orr tells this story. "We meet a lot as teams composed of people in the company from all over the world. We get together and study different trends, think of new ideas, things like that. The idea for Man of the Month (a very successful in-line promotion for Silhouette Desire) was something that came strictly out of editorial. It came out of one of the task forces."

"That's right. We had already commissioned the art for the promotion, which had been an editorial idea," Cinnamon added. "It was supposed to be a large couple on the front, small man on the back. Then when we got the art it was so good, we decided to switch it around and do a large man on the front, small couple on the back for the first few months."

"What a winner!" Orr said.

"Yeah," agreed Cinnamon. "We've never looked back."

Sometimes it happens that way. Sometimes not.

"Sometimes you just go on a gut feel," says Cinnamon. "I don't think there's just one answer to why we go with a certain look for a series. Sometimes we've done market work, we'll design a new cover and we know we want it to try to say sweet and romantic, or a more sensual read, or a bigger book look or whatever and we go out to the consumer and the consumer says, no way! They'll have a totally different interpretation to what we think they'll have."

An author can have a lot of input.

"Some authors are very interested in their covers," says Orr. "Others are just generally happy with whatever Shelley does. Right, Shelley?"

"An author can have a strong feeling about what kind of tone she thinks the story has and she can communicate that to her editor," agrees Cinnamon. "The editor or the senior editor of the line will go into a meeting with an art person, a marketing person and the senior editor will communicate that idea to everyone in the room. If the author's idea is going to make it a more saleable book, then certainly it'll go on the cover. On the other hand, if there's an element in the art fact sheets that they know will kill a book on the stands, that element in the art fact sheets will be highlighted and noted as, this has been asked for but we don't think this is a saleable feature."

Such as?

"A gun. A gun will not work on a romance cover. Another example is when it's a happy, lighthearted story, the editor's read it and she knows that, but the author feels that the essential scenes in the book are darker and more dramatic. We tend not to go with the author's idea when that's the case. That's because the consumer who's looking at that cover and doesn't know what's inside says to herself, Oh, I really need a dark, brooding hero and a darker, dramatic kind of love story. And then, if they buy a book with that kind of cover and end up with a light, sweet-hearted romance inside, I think they're going to be unhappy."

"What we're hoping to do with the authors through the art fact sheets now is to put more emphasis on the tone and the feeling of the story. With the cover, we're trying to convey more of where the story is going to take you, as

A great deal is done through sophisticated marketing techniques ... Some, though, is just pure, dumb luck.

a reader, not just a key scene between the couple which may, as I said, be a lot darker and more dramatic than the rest of the story."

What else is a killer at retail?

Cinnamon hesitates. "Well, trucks." Trucks? "Well, things that are sort of hard-edged or masculine. You wouldn't put a hockey scene on the front cover. If the heroine was a carpenter, you wouldn't have a lot of tools and stuff showing in the background. Backhoes, things like that."

How about tall, dark and handsome, does it still sell? Beards, moustaches—blond guys? You rarely see them. Are they killers at retail?

Cinnamon laughs. "We just paint what the author tells us to paint. If you give us a blond hero we'll put him on

the cover. Beards? Moustaches? You'll have to ask the authors."

I confess I've always picked outdoor scenes for my art fact sheets. I happen to think outdoor scenes are more interesting. Does this pay off at retail?

"Hmm. Open spaces," says Orr.

"Yeah, I think that's why the cowboy books sell so well. They indicate these big, open spaces that most of us don't have anymore. I

"Open spaces...I think that's why these cowboy books sell so well."

**Katherine Orr,
Harlequin v.p.**

think that's why they sell so well in Japan, for instance. Think about the Australian outback books that we used to publish way back—and we still do. They were very, very hot in the early days. To some degree, they've probably been replaced by the Montana Mavericks and the western frontier of the U.S. books. They're very appealing."

"It's interesting, though," adds Cinnamon, shooting down my theory. "I don't know that a cover that has an interior scene would sell any less than one that had an outdoor scene. We do month by month, title by title reviews once or twice a year, try to look at trends, try to see what's selling. I can't say that every Number One book of the month or in the line has an outdoor scene. Some of them have kids, some of them have men alone, some of them have a couple in an embrace, some of them have women alone. There's a real variety."

So, just what is it that makes a cover artist outstanding in the series field?

"Relate that question to writers and you'll have the answer," says Cinnamon. "How do they put the elements together? How consistently good are they? How do they interpret the words we give them into images? Are they reliable—when they say they'll deliver, do they?"

"I always think that working with the artist is very much like working with the author. They want to have their input into the art. It's their names and their style that's going into it. Most of them care. It's their baby, too. They become a part of this family that's responsible for creating the book."

Some artists will do a dozen or more covers a year for Harlequin, some only a few. Cinnamon has one artist, an expert in paper sculpture, that she might use only once every 18 months.

Oddly, cover artists are rarely credited for their work. Even last year's Christmas card from Harlequin, which featured cover art from new author Joyce Sullivan's *Intrigue*, mentioned the author and her title, but not the name of the artist who created the painting. Why?

"I can answer that," says Orr. "My depart- ➔

Uncovering Series Cover Strategy

(Continued from page 11)

ment did the Christmas card. We kind of liked the fact that there were Christmas lights in the painting, it kind of gave the image of Christmas, but because the card was going to the authors, we decided to celebrate the author and put the name of her book on the card."

"In the ten years I've been here, I don't think one artist has ever asked me for credit on the copyright page," Cinnamon says.

On the other hand, most artists are more than happy to sell their paintings. Those who work regularly for a publisher such as Harlequin tend to build up a lot of inventory. Acrylic, oils, watercolor...the paintings can vary in size and medium.

Tony Meers, of Etobicoke, Ontario is one artist who'd be happy to hear from a buyer. There isn't a huge market for cover paintings, he says, but agrees that if more people knew they were for sale—authors and readers—he'd probably sell more.

"I generally sell a painting for \$1,000, somewhat less if it's the author buying," he says. Meers' works most often with a 15"x20" size, but some artists, such as the grand old man of cover art, Will Davies, works almost in miniature. His paintings are small and delicate and tend toward an impressionist style, less popular today than it once was.

As do many of the artists, Meers does other illustration work, such as comic books. His New York agent keeps him busy with a variety of projects, which Meers prefers. For his cover art, Meers chooses the models, sets up the shoot with a photographer and selects the shots he'll paint, after doing sketches and consulting with the publisher's art buyer.

So, since artists are rarely credited for their work—an exception is Will Davies, who usually receives credit on the copyright page—how does an author or a reader go about buying a favorite cover painting?

"Talk to the editor. The editor will go through PR and

the PR will come and see the art director," says Cinnamon.

Cover art. A wonderful title. Back blurbs. Brand-name authors. Gee, how's an ordinary author to figure out how to make sure her book sells?

Other than writing a good book, which is always the best advice, don't bother. Fact is—and this is oddly comforting—no one really knows.

"Some of our lines have new author months. I know historicals has March madness, four new authors in that pub month, for instance," says Cinnamon. "There've been years when they've outsold all the other books that have been published in that month, sometimes in that year. Outsold big authors, outsold everyone."

Why?

"I don't know how you explain it," confesses Cinnamon, "but it's good news for everyone. You just never know. Fortunately with the rack space our company has, we're able to publish a lot of titles, buy new authors, take a few chances. With 70 new books on the racks every month, under 13 imprints, today's reader can really go shopping."

Good news, indeed. **NINK**

Judy E. Corser, who writes as Judith Bowen, has an April 1996 Harlequin Superromance, The Man from Blue River, with a cover that features "a cowboy, a couple of kids, a kitten or two, a pregnant lady and some terrific mountains." How can she miss? She also has a painting on her office wall of her first cover by Connecticut artist Diane Voyas.

"In the ten years I've been here, I don't think one artist has ever asked me for credit on the copyright page."

Shelley Cinnamon

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

Jean Ross Ewing (*Jean R. Ewing*), Ridgway CO

Kit Garland (*Kit Gardner*), Plainfield IL

Beverly T. Haaf (*Beverly Terry*), Beverly NJ

Catherine Maxwell (*Cathy Maxwell*), Midlothian VA

Christine Pacheco (*Christa Conan*), Thornton CO

Christina Cordaire Strong (*Christine Cordaire*), Chesapeake VA

Louise F. Titchener, Baltimore MD

New Members

Eugenia Riley Essenmacher (*Eugenia Riley*), Houston TX

Colleen Faulkner, Seaford DE

Kathleen Garner (*Catherine Spencer*), White Rock BC, Canada

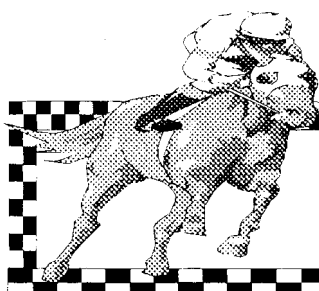
Metsy Hingle, Covington LA

Rainy Kirkland, Marlton NJ

Mary L. Lechleidner (*Delia Parr*), Pennsauken NJ

Pamela Macaluso, Lompoc CA

Jean Raynes (*Diane Austell*), Palos Verdes Estates CA



NINC Members on the USA Today List

The Fast Track

The Fast Track is a 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. Alternately, Carole's phone/fax number is 817-292-6208. 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	4 Feb	11 Feb	18 Feb	25 Feb
Leanne Banks	<i>Ridge: The Avenger</i>				142n
Rebecca Brandewyne	<i>Dust Devil</i>		102n		
Sandra Brown	<i>Tempest in Eden</i>		29n	26	49
Dixie Browning	<i>The Beauty, the Beast and the Baby</i>				118n
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Cove</i>				10n
Julie Garwood	<i>For the Roses</i>	24	42	71	100
Tami Hoag	<i>Guilty as Sin</i>		72n	54	67
Tami Hoag	<i>Night Sins</i>	66q	157	92	
Joan Hohl	<i>Another Spring</i>			93n	84
Iris Johansen	<i>Lion's Bride</i>	61	132		
Katherine Kingsley	<i>In the Wake of the Wind</i>			169n	87
Debbie Macomber	<i>Falling for Him</i>		137n		
Debbie Macomber	<i>The Playboy and the Widow</i>		115n		
Kat Martin	<i>Midnight Rider</i>	73	57	116	
Teresa Medeiros	<i>Breath of Magic</i>		35n	20	37
Carla Neggers	<i>Finding You</i>			135n	
Mary Jo Putney	<i>Shattered Rainbows</i>	63	147		
Susan Elizabeth Phillips	<i>Kiss an Angel</i>	144			
Nora Roberts	<i>Born in Shame</i>	106			
Nora Roberts	<i>The Heart of Devin MacKade</i>			91n	40
Nora Roberts	<i>Without a Trace</i>	129			
Bertrice Small	<i>Hellion</i>	62	62	126	
Pamela Toth	<i>Buchanan's Baby</i>		98n		
Sherryl Woods	<i>The Rancher and His Unexpected Daughter</i>		85n		

Anyone who made the list but missed getting the hard copy of *USA Today* please send an SASE within 30 days to the NINK editor, who will attempt to provide a copy.



EAST OF THE HUDSON

Bulletin, Bulletin, Bulletin

This item, just in from a sharp-eyed Shannon Harper, who spotted it in her Daytona Beach paper:

John Grisham, the most successful commercial author in recent years, is suing the agent who discovered him in a slush pile and represented him for years.

According to the report, Grisham, a lawyer himself, is suing the estate of Garon, who died of a heart attack last year. The Mississippi writer is also suing a New York attorney, Elliott Lefkowitz, to whom funds were allegedly diverted.

I can see the headlines now: "Author-Attorney sues Agent, Attorney."

It's no wonder that when Grisham went looking for a new agent after Garon's death, he ended up selecting his former Doubleday editor, David Gernert.

The report also estimated Grisham's 1994-95 income at \$29 million. That ought to provide plenty of opportunity for skim.

More when details become available.

It's About Time

Romance Alive Audio has its heart in the right place. Beginning immediately, it intends to calculate reserves against return on the basis of, imagine this, actual reserves against return.

The audio firm intends to figure its reserves against an author's historic rate of return, not by some arbitrary and publisher-biased formula which may or may not resemble reality.

President Beverly Blonstein said most audio publishers reserve about 30% of royalties against return. But she noted romance authors typically have stronger sell-through rates than average.

In the future, Romance Alive authors will be started at a reserve rate of 30% for the first reporting period. But after that first period, reserves will be retained on the basis of the return rate for the previous quarter. In other words, if 5% of an author's tapes came back, the reserve would be calculated at 5%.

"Romance and women's fiction authors are such a big part of the money that comes in to publishers, but they don't always get the same advantages and respect as other authors," Blonstein said. "This is a way to make the playing field more fair for them."

As a personal matter, I applaud the change, but I also wonder why all publishers don't follow suit. The reserves clauses are a mess and, at the very least, ought to be subject to negotiation.

I predict, though, that publishers will change that pol-

icy just about the time we all get "acceptable manuscript" clauses as broad and generous as the one Joan Collins got from Random House.

(One thought about that case: The lawyers and spin doctors blew smoke all over, making it difficult to see who really won, but three weeks after the trial, the judge ruled that Random owed Joan almost a million bucks, including interest. That tells us who won and who lost more clearly than any lawyer ever could.)

All Used Up

I want to tell you why my wife, a very scrupulous soul, threw a "fan" letter in the trash the other day.

Late last year, I ran across some items in *Publishers Weekly* that have stuck in my mind ever since. The first involved Nickleby's, a Columbus, Ohio, bookstore that won the *PW* Bookseller of the Year award in 1993. Just before Christmas, Nickleby's, fighting for its life against an onslaught of three Media Play stores and three Barnes & Noble superstores, announced that it had decided to fight back by selling used books.

USED BOOKS? That's right, books that are the "soiled doves" of the publishing industry.

Palmer Cook, the owner of the store, said the rationale for used books was compelling. They are cheap to acquire, they offer a huge profit margin and superstores don't carry them.

"Independents can't be clones of the large stores and survive," he explained. In other words, used books are just good business.

But they are good business with a price. That price is image. Frontlist independent bookstores pride themselves on their literary cachet. It's hard to keep *literary* leadership when your shelves are stocked with hardbacks thumbed through once and then sold for pennies on the dollar by your local book reviewer.

Cook swore he would be ever-so-tasteful in his used-book business. He promised to offer only "fresh, clean" volumes to avoid "a pawnshop atmosphere." He also promised to mix them right in with his stock of new copies, so the gentry wouldn't be offended; but clearly, the new policy marked a serious come-down for what had once been a leading regional independent.

Then in the same *PW* issue, I found news that Shakespeare & Co., arguably the most influential single independent in the country, had already launched itself on the same grubby track.

Shakespeare is the neighborhood bookstore for half of New York's publishing industry. It is purported to be one of the major contributors to the *New York Times* bestseller list. All that may change, though, once word spreads that the flagship of Manhattan bookselling is jumping into bed



EAST OF THE HUDSON

with used books in a big way.

Mike Feder, manager of Shakespeare's used section, said that the store began selling "previously owned" tomes in 1994. As of late 1995, it was offering 12,000 used, out-of-print or remaindered titles, with hardcovers going out at \$6 or \$7 and paperbacks at \$4.

There is competition between the sheets for anything that is profitable. In addition to the new-only superstore competition in Shakespeare's Broadway neighborhood, it must also contend with a sizable used-book store directly across the street. Even so, Shakespeare's pre-owned cheapies are a big hit. The section is a "profit center" (lovely word, that) for Shakespeare. It is expanding at the unnerving rate of 1,000 titles a week.

The trend toward used books is not new. Powell's, that Oregon institution that is still among my favorite bookstores in the world, has offered a mix of new and used books for a long time. The Portland store is often mentioned as a model for independents who are struggling to stay alive.

But the direction is troubling, if only because it is quickly gaining momentum. As front-list hardbacks spike toward \$30, and as mass-market paperbacks drift upward past \$6 like untethered blimps, there will be more and more incentive to resell books that have already been read once, twice or as many times as the binding will bear. (It brings a whole new meaning to the name of another bookstore—The Tattered Cover.)

There are, of course, two losers in the used-book carnival, the publishers and the authors. For once, we and our corporate colleagues in the book business are on exactly the same side. We are both losing to a new generation of used-book purveyors who care a good deal less about cachet than about cash.

Writer royalties are already being squeezed by publishers. Book-club provisions, some of them absolutely heinous, are eroding authors profits all over the landscape. Where publishers once purchased North American rights, they now purchase World Rights—for the same price. More and more often, we are offered contracts in which normal royalty rates are suspended for bulk sales; for instance, to warehouse clubs. Now it seems that authors are also going to be squeezed by the very independent booksellers who are first to talk about how important they are to an author's career.

And we are letting it happen without a whimper.

It may or may not be fair to trim a point or two off of the royalty for volume sales, but at least we are still being paid. With used books, we get zip, zero, nada, zilch, zed, nolla.

No wonder the booksellers like used volumes. They are getting our profit, as well as the publisher's. A regular gold mine.

But how, you ask, does this relate to my wife and the fan letter she tossed in the trash? It's really quite simple. The letter was from two very nice romance fans in a small town which shall remain nameless. They had their own used-book store and wanted any promotional material we might send them. They particularly wanted to be put on the mailing list for advance reader copies from my wife's publisher.

They needed the ARCs, they said, to keep their fans up to date on new books. Innocent enough, right?

"Sure, send them some newsletters," I said. "Call the publicist in New York and get them on the advance list."

"No," was her answer.

"Why not?" I asked.

That's when she reminded me what we saw last time we were in a used-book store in Enumclaw, Washington: A whole shelf of ARCs, most of them for books that hadn't even been published yet. The advance copies were being rented out at the rate of a buck a day.

Figuring a two-day turn-around on inventory and a two-month lead time before publication, the rental scam was probably siphoning off forty or fifty readers before the book ever reached print.

Suddenly, the used-book business doesn't seem as harmless as it used to be.

Several years ago, Novelists, Inc., had a president, Georgia Bockoven, who wanted to raise a little hell over used books. Authors resisted because, at the time, most of the used-book sellers were mom-and-pop types, or Sister Teresa in polyester support hose. No author wanted to be seen as taking bread from the mouths of such vulnerable folk.

Now, the used-book purveyors are hard-headed businessmen. There is even a chain of bookstores that sell exclusively used volumes.

Georgia, you were ahead of your time.

— Evan Maxwell

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Aid for the Cyber-Disadvantaged, Part II

By
JANICE YOUNG BROOKS

The Internet is expanding at an explosive rate. Two years ago, when I first started exploring, I was constantly frustrated by all the sites that sounded interesting and informative, but proved to have very little content. Now I find myself relying on it to find nearly anything I need to know.

The last time my agent FedExed a check to me, it didn't arrive the next day. I got the tracking number from her and went to http://www.fedex.com:80/track_it.html and traced it from its pickup at her office, to the Newark airport, to the plane taking it to Indianapolis, where the next plane had been grounded by bad weather. The next day I watched the plane take off, land in Kansas City, then saw the envelope given to the driver and eventually signed off as delivered at my house. I knew everything FedEx knew about that package. United Parcel Service has the same service.

I don't subscribe to the Discovery Channel or the History Channel magazines because I get them online for free. You can find dictionaries, encyclopedias, *Roget's Thesaurus*, zip codes, congressional districts and voting records—practically every general reference you might need—on the Internet.

Besides business and professionally related material, there's a lot that's just plain fun and can provide great inside information for background research. Do you (or your character) quilt? Grow bonsai? Do you want to hang out with forensic scientists or mystery fans or wrestlers? Or ask someone what kind of hummingbird that was outside your window? If you're stuck at the door of the monster's castle in a computer game, or can't figure out who your great-great-grandfather's sister married or exactly how Queen Elizabeth I was related to Lettice Knollys, somebody on the Internet probably knows the answer.

Groups of people congregate in usenets (also called newsgroups) to chat about their special interests. They have fairly descriptive headers and you can read only what interests you. Last time I downloaded the full list, there were over 14,000 of them. They're divided roughly into categories. Some of the major ones are: COMP (computer science), REC (recreation, hobbies, art), SCI (science), ALT (alternative views). So if you want to talk about mystery novels, you'd go to REC.ARTS.MYSTERY.

There are also listserves that provide much the same service. You have to subscribe to a listserve. Everybody sends notes to the listserve address and at intervals of anything from an hour to a week, the computer you've written them to bundles them all up and sends them out as one big e-mail. You get them all whether you want them or not. The advantage is that the

person who runs the listserve can cut off access to troublemakers.

Besides information, there's human contact. Some of those who haven't experienced the Inter-

net say it's cold, impersonal and distant. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Internet has revived the art of letter writing, which can be very close, warm and personal. I've been part of a group of about 25 friends who found a common ground five years ago. We each write several notes a day to the whole group. We have a college student, and a man in his 70s, and every age between. Two of them are in England, the rest spread from New Jersey to California, Michigan to Texas. We've shared our lives. We've lost parents, gotten degrees, celebrated a first book sale, lost jobs, gone through divorces, dieted with a member who has lost 170 pounds and counting, had babies and one member is currently keeping us up to date on her/his sex change. This is intimate! I know these people far better than I know my neighbors. We have a holiday gift exchange, send snail mail birthday cards and have had in-person meets in St. Louis (central) and Las Vegas (fun).

Abuses: Naturally, there's an opposite side to this. There are loonies out there who can indulge their looniness to the fullest behind the safe cloaks of ever-changing usernames. I once posted a note in a comic book discussion (God only knows what I was doing there!) that it might be nice if they had their own separate category. I meant it well, but it pushed the wrong buttons for a bunch of extraordinarily foul-mouthed teenagers who e-mailed me for weeks with obscene suggestions for where I could put my opinions.

This is distressing, but there are downright dangers, too. Unless it's a private group, never post your address in public. Don't even say what city you live in. If you haven't already signed up for a service, I'd also suggest you choose a gender-neutral username and preferably one that can't be looked up in a phone book. Also, be very careful about ordering anything by credit card. Most sites that sell things will allow you to place the order with the first few digits, then fax or phone in the entire number.

The Internet is a stupendous source of information and with a little extra caution, can be enormous fun as well. **NINK**

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