

Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 7, Number 5

May 1996

Publishers Are from Mars, Writers Are from Venus

This is not another “rag the publishers” piece. (Well, not entirely.) My title, with apologies to John Gray, is intended to suggest that publishers and writers have a hard time seeing things from each other’s point of view. I’m sure this does not come as a revelation to anyone who’s published a book, but let’s take a moment to explore the notion anyway.

Gray, in his best-selling book on improving communication between men and women, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, says the two sexes can’t understand each other until they first appreciate the fact that they speak two different languages and come from two different cultures (planets, if you will). Unless and until this fact is fully appreciated, neither can accurately interpret the actions and words of the other, nor can they begin to get what they want and need from their relationships.

In using this analogy to examine the relationship between publishers and writers, I am *not* suggesting that the problems are gender-based. Writers are of both sexes, and heaven knows women are a major force in publishing houses. Gender is not the issue.

Nor can the dichotomy between our Martian publisher and Venusian writer be defined as the conflict between a

by
RONN KAISER

“business” mentality and an “artistic” mentality. Most of us, at least in the commercial fiction ranks, are professionals first and poets second. We have a craft, perhaps an art, but we’re doing it to earn a living, not change the literary and cultural landscape.

So how do we characterize the problem? I think both parties are stuck in an antiquated system that unnecessarily puts them at odds. Both are mired in an environment of distrust, suspicion, paranoia, resentment and even contempt. Yes, there are individual relationships that work. Yes, there is often a public show of mutual respect and harmony. But the underlying facts suggest a very different reality.

Martians see Venusians as parochial, egocentric and ambitious.

We need a new way of conceptualizing the relationship between writer and publisher. The old model doesn’t work well and is unhealthy. In psychoanalytic terms, we are bogged down in a state of *co-dependency*.

On Mars, “the bottom line” is the name of the game. Martians know Venusians aren’t stupid, but they see them as living in a small world with a narrow perspective—a world where dollars have a different meaning. On Mars, the bottom line involves issues Venusians know nothing about and can’t fully appreciate. Martians see Venusians as parochial, egocentric and ambitious. This perceived myopia makes Venusians untrustworthy. They can’t be given comprehensive data and information because they are incapable of keeping it in perspective.

On Mars, the accountant is king. Long ago the Martian rulers decided the way to deal with these bizarre Venusian creatures was to keep them barefoot and pregnant. According to Martian mythology (prejudice?), Venusians are, in their hearts, all *prima donnas*. They’re fickle, they’re whores and they’ll use a Martian in (continued on page 7)

In This Issue

President’s Column	2
Letters to the Editor	3
Tips for Cyberspace	11
Baltimore Conf, Editor/Agent Update	12
The Fast Track	13
East of the Hudson	14
Tea with Miss Marple	16

Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne†	Linda Barlow
Janice Young Brooks†	Georgia Bockoven
Jasmine Cresswell†	Evan Maxwell
Maggie Osborne†	William Bernhardt
Marianne Shock†	

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

1996 Board of Directors

PRESIDENT Victoria Thompson
563 56th Street
Altoona PA 16602-1233
Ph 814-942-2268 / Fax 814-946-4744
E-mail: NINC1989@aol.com

VICE PRESIDENT Patricia Gardner Evans
14201 Skyline Rd, N.E.
Albuquerque NM 87123-2335
Ph 505-293-8015 / Fax 505-296-9139

SECRETARY Sandra Kitt
91 Payson Avenue #3L
New York NY 10034
Ph 212-569-8076 / Fax 212-769-5007
E-mail: sankitt@amnh.org

TREASURER Phyllis DiFrancesco
56 Woodland Drive
E. Windsor NJ 08520-2118
Ph 609-443-6194 / Fax 609-448-8105
E-mail: snjd91b@prodigy.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR Vicki Lewis Thompson
1536 West Cool Drive
Tucson AZ 85704-2141
Ph 520-297-9308 / Fax 520-797-4828
E-mail: vltpenpwr@aol.com

ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE
Marianne Shock
251 Lothrop
Grosse Pointe MI 48236-3405

CENTRAL COORDINATOR Randy Russell
Novelists, Inc.
P.O. Box 1166
Mission KS 66222-0166
Ph/Fax 816-561-4524
(Call before faxing)

NINC/NINK correspondence
can also be sent to the
e-mail address: ninc1989@aol.com
Web site: <http://www.ninc.com>
Send Address Changes to the Central
Coordinator

† Founder

Copyright ©1996 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Look How Far We've Come

Part of knowing where you're going is knowing how far you've come. The current Board is working on some long-range goals for Novelists, Inc., and one board member suggested that a look backward—to what NINC's original goals were—might be appropriate.

Looking through the NINC archives, I found not only the original letter of invitation sent to the founding members, but also their replies and suggestions for what NINC should be. These replies were so fascinating, I decided to share some of them with you.

Women's Popular Fiction Writers' Network

Sound familiar? This was the original name of Novelists, Inc. It only lasted a month or two, however. The acronym, WPFWN, was too unwieldy, and after a few OB/GYN jokes and some convincing arguments on how we shouldn't exclude male writers, we changed our name to Novelists, Inc. Some member comments:

"Writers of popular fiction," however unwieldy and large this may someday make the organization, is best. The very concept of "women's popular fiction" irks me. Fiction should have no gender. Ideas don't, talent doesn't and wit, certainly not. I read and write for everyone, or try to—as should we all. — Edith Layton (Note: We have yet to become "unwieldy and large" but we're still working on it!)

How should we define "women's fiction"? It may be a term people in the industry use and accept for expeditious reasons, but I'm not sure we should as writers. Is "popular fiction" or "general fiction" then for men only? Is women's fiction a subcategory of popular fiction? How so? Women's fiction implies things about the writers, the readers, the content of the books that I'm not sure we want, need or should imply, regardless of what the industry is doing. Let's lead the evolution of this area, not follow current publishing trends and buzzwords. — Carla Neggers

Who Should Belong

The original goals of NINC were simple: 1. Publish a roster of members to facilitate networking. 2. Publish a newsletter. 3. Hold a members-only conference. 4. Limit membership to published authors only.

All the details were to be decided by member opinion (and were), and they had a lot of opinions on exactly who should qualify for NINC membership:

Let's make this a truly professional organization, not because of an elitist attitude, but because we need desperately to network, we professionals, with others of our kind to exchange news, trends, ideas, etc. Does a surgeons' orga-

This Month from the President:

- LOOK HOW FAR WE'VE COME
- WOMEN'S POPULAR FICTION WRITERS' NETWORK
- WHO SHOULD BELONG

nization admit yearners? No. Same with us! We learn from each other, gain strength in the marketplace, gain respect from publishers because we are professionals.

— Irma Ruth Walker

I like the idea of an organization made up of the “work horses” of the industry, one that should be able to gain better conditions for those of us who support the whole structure. — Patricia Maxwell

The members voted on several options for membership requirements and settled on two published novels, at least one of which must have been published in the past five years. In retrospect, that is probably what has made NINC what it is today. By the time a writer has published a second book, the novelty has worn off and reality has reared its ugly head. The writer knows that publishing is a business, the editor is not our friend, and maybe the

agent isn't our friend, either. No starry-eyed novices have set NINC's course, only serious professionals.

Serious professionals are still setting the course, and we are happy to say that the course is holding steady. We will soon have several exciting new projects to announce which will directly benefit our members. Watch this space for details.

— 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.

Imitators Get Big Print Runs

I have long been both an admirer and fan of Jude Devaux, and her article in the last newsletter was written with her usual panache. However, her opinion on print runs does not apply in the mystery world. Previous sales are only one (small) part of the print run decision. When we are talking about 200,000+ paperback print runs (for books previously published in hardcover), the house looks

more closely at, and bases its print run decision on, the answer to this question: How can this book by a relatively unknown author appeal to the already-established audience of another already-bestselling mystery author? Thus, books are branded “Grishamesque,” “Graftonesque,” “Kellermanesque,” “Cornwellesque,” etc. These new books receive covers and cover copy that indicate to voracious mystery readers, “Here's Sue Grafton in Birmingham, Alabama,” or “John Grisham in Reno, Nevada,” or “Jonathan Kellerman in Missoula, Montana,” or “Patricia Cornwell in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho.” Knowing this, I hope, will help mystery authors who are doing something new, not imitative, when they try to understand why their print runs remain either small, or growing only by small increments. Grisham, Grafton, Kellerman and Cornwell all started much smaller than have their imitators.

— Diane Mott Davidson

Terrific Stuff

Just got my April '96 *Novelists' Ink*. Wow! Loved the article by Pat Warren on the author-agent bond, and was fascinated by Judy Corser's look at cover art. Really →

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 3)

terrific stuff, and when I'd finished poring through the newsletter from cover to cover, it occurred to me that *NINK* is the only trade publication I receive that delves into so many relevant issues with such professionalism and depth. No superficial summaries here. Every topic is always dissected with impeccable research and chock full of timely info. Of course, I always love "East of the Hudson" (I'm sure another deadline is a pain, Evan, but if you know how much we all look forward to our monthly dose of dry wit and scathing humor, the drudgery of column-writing might be slightly eased), and, as an Internet Newbie, I've picked up some terrific tips from Janice Young Brooks's news from cyberspace. Keep up the good work. *NINK* is simply the best, and getting better all the time.

— *Diana Whitney Hinz*

Prefers Elaine Duillo Covers

I disagree with Laura Resnick. The most successful cover artist in the romance genre is the talented and respected Elaine Duillo. Duillo, who discovered Fabio, and whose dynamite covers were responsible for an incredible increase in Johanna Lindsay's sales. An Elaine Duillo painting is fine art, and that's not just my opinion. Her work has been exhibited in a one-woman show at the Society of Illustrators in New York, and in museums and galleries all over the United States. Duillo will only do one painting a month. Put a Pino and a Duillo side by side and the difference is obvious. Elaine's skin tones, her attention to detail (she reads the manuscript), her incredible and clever genius for design which she incorporates into her work put her paintings head and shoulders above anyone else's today. I know authors who would do anything for an Elaine Duillo cover.

There is certainly a market for Duillo's work commercially after publishing. I currently own nine of her paintings, have a tenth on hold and possess six original pencil sketches of my covers. I also own two Robert McGinnis cover paintings, and the Richard Kohfield painting for *Skye O'Malley*. And I'm not the only author collecting. Resnick did an interesting series, but she obviously didn't dig deep enough.

— *Bertrice Small*

Different View of Grisham /Garon Dispute

As usual, I read this month's edition of *Novelists' Ink* from cover to cover, with great appreciation and enjoyment. And now for the infamous "but": an item in the "East of the Hudson" column not only caught my eye, but caused me a twinge of dismay.

Now, I know that we all love a bit of gossip; that is,

unless it is about us, our family or our loved ones. This item concerned my long-time agent, Jay Garon; his lawyer, Elliot J. Lefkowitz and the lawsuit recently filed by writer John Grisham.

I had seen the item before, in another publication, but without the little side comments, and at that time, too, it had bothered me, because of its implications. In the current climate, when both agents and lawyers are taking a bit of a beating, I feel compelled to give a bit more rounded picture to the facts as stated.

Jay was my agent, and my friend, for over twenty years, and most of the success I have had, I feel I owe to him. It seems to me, by the way, that Grisham owes him the same debt. As for Elliot Lefkowitz, he was my business manager for many years, when my husband and I were a corporation, and he is still a close and treasured friend. He is also one of the most honorable men I know. A theatrical attorney who handles some of the best-known stars in films, stage and various writing fields, he is highly successful and respected in the business.

Which brings me to my point. As stated, the item as first written is true, John Grisham has filed a suit against Jay Garon-Brook Assoc. and Elliot Lefkowitz, for the stated cause.

However, there are some things that the squib does not mention: Despite Jay's death, Grisham is still under contract to the Jay Garon-Brook agency. Another thing not mentioned is that Grisham asked to be released from this contract and was, understandably, refused. Next step, a sudden lawsuit.

I believe that certain inferences might be drawn from this sequence of events.

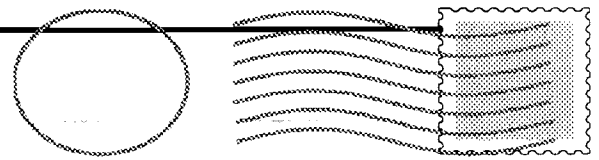
— *Patricia Matthews*

Agrees with Deveraux

Loved Jude Deveraux's article on the need(?) for an agent. Like many category writers, I found it easier to sell my first book to a publisher myself than to interest an agent in representing me. And after the first sale, what was to be gained by paying an agent to do what I was clearly able to do on my own? Nothing that I could see.

But I did buy into the theory that if I ever wanted to write a non-category book, I'd have to get an agent. I bought into the theory originally, that is. Until I'd heard dozens of horror stories about agents. Until I began going to published authors' conferences and discovered that a lot of authors were playing a game of musical chairs. For every author who had recently dumped agent A and signed with agent B, someone else had just dumped B and signed with C or D or A.

Nobody, however, seemed to believe they could simply drop out of the game and do without an agent. They just had to find the *right one*. ⇐



But why? I think the most important points Jude made is that an agent can't tell the publishing houses what to do and that print runs are based on previous sale.

So, let's say you're unhappy with your agent. If you already have a relationship with a house, already have copies of previous contracts to refer to, why hire a new agent? Why not spend a little time and save yourself a whole lot of money?

If enough writers did this, the majority of us might end up saving money. Agents might revert to the 10% standard to keep their clients happier. (Or maybe just to keep them, period.)

Of course, if you're looking to jump from category to mainstream, there's an added wrinkle—the myth that a mainstream house won't look at an established category author unless she has an agent submit for her. But that's all it is. A myth. The *real* problem for the category author is, if a mainstream house wants to make a deal, the author has no frame of reference for negotiations. You don't have an old contract to refer to with a new publisher.

I've pretty well decided what my solution to this problem will be (assuming I might some day want to broaden my horizons). If a publisher is interested in my work, I'll be hiring a literary lawyer. And not only because of the horror stories and the 15%, but also because of what's happened whenever I've talked to an agent about the possibility of having him/her represent me if I write something mainstream.

His or her interest in me as a client did an abrupt about-face when I mentioned I wasn't looking for an agent to represent me with my category house, that I intended to keep negotiating contracts with it myself.

So what was the primary interest of these agents? To help me develop a mainstream career or in skimming an easy 15% from an established cash-flow? I don't think there's much doubt about the answer.

If other NINC members feel as I do, perhaps the next agents survey should include questions about literary lawyers. I recall a brief article on the subject in a back issue of the newsletter, but I'd certainly be interested in seeing an update of recommended names.

— Dawn Stewardson

Mental Illness Overdiagnosed

It's taken me a long time to respond to the letters about mental health and the writer that have appeared in these pages in months past, but the subject is near and dear to my heart. I am appalled at the hold psychiatric labels have over the uninformed and must speak out.

During the last two centuries and beyond there have been people genuinely concerned with treating mental traumas through giving a troubled person a quiet environment, rest, good nutrition and vitamin therapy that can handle *physical* disease which results in mental disorienta-

tion. But psychiatrists would have us believe that every normal problem encountered in life is a mental illness. Worse still, they wish to prescribe drugs which only mask the problem, rather than handle its source.

Their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness* lists such ridiculous "illnesses" as "Mathematics Disorder" and "Expressive Writing Disorder." Ever consider that these patients might just need to go back and learn their numbers and alphabet before going on to assimilate the basics of math and grammar? The diagnostic manual is upgraded every year so they can throw in more illnesses. A *New York Times* article of June, 1994 criticizes the book as applying no inherent standard of what constitutes a mental disorder. The book of labels includes almost every activity, emotion and condition in life. If one is to believe this list of maladies, we're all mentally ill. What ever happened to just plain old experience? For more information and statistics on psychiatry's manipulation of patients and the public (Hmmm, fodder for a novel?), one can contact Citizen's Commission on Human Rights at 1-800-869-2247.

It is sad that psychiatry's influence has now gone so far as to convince some artists that they cannot be creative unless they suffer a mental malady. By agreeing with this premise, artists only place themselves under the control of a profession fraught with abuse and whose members are more and more frequently being sued for unethical behavior and for prescribing addicting drugs that oftentimes only result in making the problem worse. If, as writers, any of you wish to give up your free will and individual creativity, then go ahead and place control of your life and your writing in the hands of a psychiatrist and his mind-numbing drugs that you can be sure will have plenty of negative side effects.

When asking oneself why one has not yet written a breakout book, I would say that it has less to do with one's mental state and more to do with a publishing industry that is unpredictable, over-inventoried and highly competitive. I hardly think taking a psychiatrist's pill can fix that.

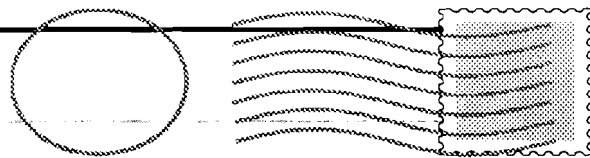
— Patricia Werner

Get It in Writing

I found the "Breaking Up Is Hard to do" article very intriguing. There were some good points made. However, I was rather surprised to read that some agents and writers preferred a phone call. I thought it was common knowledge that when an agent/author relationship is being terminated, the party terminating must have a written proof of termination.

Sorry guys, but a phone call doesn't do that. With current technology, a fax is the fastest and most efficient method of having confirmed notice of termination. I have had to leave two agents, both of whom I consider wonderful women, friends and people I truly care →

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



(Continued from page 5)

for. But leaving an agent is a business decision. Period. You pay an agent a percentage to handle your business. If they are not handling matters to your satisfaction, then you have to either voice your concerns or terminate the agent. Both should be done in writing.

It's a shame when an agent and author cannot continue in a comfortable and professional relationship. When parties allow personal feelings into the situation, often the result is gossip, anger, hurt and breaches in fiduciary duty. These things don't reflect well on the professionalism of either party.

Terminating a business relationship with a client or agent has to be handled professionally in order to protect both parties, which means termination should be written and have proof of delivery. If the agent and author want to have a phone conversation afterward to discuss the reasons for termination or to wish each other well, then fine. In fact, I feel there would be less resentment and unprofessional behavior on both sides if lines of communication were kept cordial and open.

— *Jill Barnett*

Does a Rifle Butt Count as a Gun?

Applause as usual for the March and April editions. I am delighted with the ongoing dialogue about agents—Jude Deveraux's wonderful and surprising article, the letters in response and Pat Warren's article on "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do" to name a few recent examples. Presenting all sides of an issue is what sets *NINK* apart from other publications. I assume that there are as many opinions about the pros and cons of author representation as there are agents and writers, so keep the discussion going, please!

As for guns and covers: I read with interest Judy Corser's article on romance series art work. Shelley Cinnamon of Harlequin states that once she got a gun on a Harlequin Historical cover. However, my partner, Madeline Porter, and I (a.k.a. Madeline Harper) had a Temptation cover (*The Wolf*) in April, 1992 with a gun on it. I remember the editor telling me how she'd fought with the art department to make it happen. Okay, so the whole gun wasn't shown—just the butt of a rifle slung over the hero's shoulder, but the hint of an armed hero didn't hurt sales at all.

— *Shannon Harper*

Setting the Record Straight

What an utterly smug, one-of-the-girls letter sent by Name Withheld. Wouldn't it be nice to think that everyone

who has made it in life had it handed to her on a platter?

Is the letter writer implying that I did nothing whatever to further my own career? That my success is due entirely to chance and circumstance—and a loving publishing house, of course? Does this person live in the real world?

Name Withheld says that I am too successful to be "typical" of NINC membership. Does that mean to be considered a full member one must *not* be successful? At what level of success is a writer excluded from the club? At three bestsellers? At four? If I'd had only five books published and never made any list, would my article have been considered more knowledgeable?

And, most importantly, if I ride in a limo does it mean that I'm no longer qualified to talk about writing? Sort of amnesia by leather, I guess.

For the record, my first book did *not* make the *New York Times* list nor have several of them, including one last year. And I am *not* with my original publishing house. Actually, I'm not even with my second one. But then, when you are blithely dismissing 20 years of struggle by an author, why bother with facts?

I thought Ms. Resnick's madder-than-hell letter had a valid criticism of my article, but the other letter that said my experience doesn't count because I'm too successful is too stupid for me to take. I hope Name Withheld has a very good agent!

— *Jude Deveraux*

March Board Meeting Summary

The 1997 conference site will be New York, and mid-town hotels are currently supplying bids to the committee for rooms and meeting facilities. The committee will do a site trip shortly to New York.

The redesigned maillist is functioning and getting good response. The Board approved establishing a second list for members with e-mail. This list is not for posting but for a quick exchange of information and news.

Also, a market survey committee is being formed.

Keep It to Yourselves:

Just a reminder that the roster included with this month's NINK is for the exclusive use of our members and is not to be shared with non-members.

Venus vs. Mars

(Continued from page 1)

any way they have to in order to achieve stardom.

On Venus, success, recognition and validation are the name of the game. Venusians have an overweening desire to share their dreams, fantasies and imagination with millions of strangers through the written word, and to profit from it, if they can. They want to be appreciated for the allure and deftness of their minds. They want to give their readers a perspective on the world. Praise is essential, but naked praise is suspect. Recognition of their worth,

backed by gold, is the desired reward.

Venusians know they need Martians in the same way women aspiring to motherhood need men.

Venusians know they need Martians in the same way women aspiring to motherhood need men. Although the

reading public is the final arbiter, Venusians are aware that everything they do must pass through the filter of the Martian mind. Martians, they know, are not simply midwives. They're playing a creative role of their own. They make money by making stars.

Venusians want their shot at the big-time, but they abhor the thought of being exploited. They don't want to be taken for granted or considered a "necessary evil." Venusians see the Martian style as patronizing. Venusians hunger to be treated honestly and fairly. Though rejection is the ultimate defeat, being demeaned and discounted—treated like a child in other words—is a close second and almost as bad.

Writers and publishers each have a way of living up to the other's worst expectations. But must we live under an uneasy truce in which both sides cooperate only enough to ensure mutual survival, or can we do better?

I submit that what the publishing industry needs is for both parties to think in terms of *partnership*. One would think this is obvious, but it isn't. Publishers tend to treat writers like pampered mistresses who can be bought off with riches and attention and flattery rather than treating them like business partners. As a result, writers have come to believe that their power is in their allure. The more a mistress is lusted after by other men (read other publishers), the more likely she is to receive generous rewards for her services. Her desirability gives her leverage. Accordingly she either seeks the attention of others or at least makes damned sure her paramour sees the loving glances coming from other quarters.

Publishers resent this game of flirtation and counter with manipulation—sweet talk, lies, flattery, whatever it takes to keep her affection and loyalty. The best of them do it with good intentions, perhaps convincing themselves they're acting in their mistress's interest, perhaps under the false assumption there are certain things a woman

(read writer) can't be trusted to understand. The system perpetuates itself with both sides playing false roles. The publishing industry, in other words, is stuck in the nineteenth century.

The blame for this state of affairs does not rest entirely with publishers. To the extent writers refuse to stand up and make our feelings known, we contribute to the problem. At the recent Novelists, Inc. conference in Denver, I was disappointed to see so much timidity on the part of writers in joint sessions with editors and agents. Too often we put on smiles and tiptoe around issues when *everybody's* interests would be best served by a frank discussion of the issues dividing us. There is no need for rancor and hostility, granted, but no important problem can be solved without honest communication.

Before considering solutions, it behooves us to examine the problem more closely. What's really wrong with this nineteenth century system in which we operate?

First, it is unbalanced. Publishers have all the relevant information and are unwilling to share it. They have learned that a mistress is best controlled if kept in the dark.

Second, there is no trust. Publishers and writers see themselves as different creatures. Publishers live in a world where the common currency is accounting numbers and marketing data, while writers live in a world of dreams. How can they expect us to understand their numbers and how can we expect them to understand our creative visions?

Third, we live in a state of war. Writers have no power except for personal allure. We can use our charm to exploit the publisher's insecurities by appealing to their rivals, playing one off against the other. But even here there are limits. Our power is defined by the extent of our beauty, our youth and our appeal (read perceived commercial value).

The publishing industry, in other words, is stuck in the nineteenth century.

In addressing solutions to the problem we must ask what the parties really want. Publishers desire loyalty. (A mistress is, after all, a big investment.) Writers, on the other hand, crave validation. Yes, we want money—we have to live, too—but that's only the starting point. We want fair treatment, respect, trust and equality. What both parties need to understand is that they are *partners* in a *joint venture*.

It is an obvious notion. In fact, book publishing should be the prototypical example of the partnership form at work. How many other business ventures involve parties who need each other so desperately? And yet neither side looks at it this way. Why? In my view, it's because of habit, tradition and the inability or unwillingness of the parties to communicate effectively. ➔

Venus vs. Mars

(Continued from page 7)

How many other business ventures involve parties who need each other so desperately?

How would a true partnership between publisher and writer work? First, the partners must be equal in the sense that they make joint decisions, having access to all relevant information. Horses and rider are not equal partners. Neither are mistresses and paramours. True partners are.

Look at it this way; Publishers are risking time, capital and other resources. But so are you! In putting together a deal, partners bring what they have to the bargaining table. Everybody looks at the pieces laid out and, after some give and take, the elements are arranged for the maximum benefit of all concerned. If the proposed deal makes sense, a bargain can be struck. All the parties need is to trust in the ability of each other to perform.

Second, each party must maintain perspective. Even the most successful writers aren't experts on all aspects of publishing and marketing. A joint venture is most successful when the relative strengths and capacities of the partners are optimally utilized. This does not mean that the partners should not be fully informed on all aspects of the undertaking. The key here is *discretion*. The wise partner trusts the abilities of the other, but that does not mean they abdicate responsibility. And believe it or not, some writers have knowledge and talent which extends beyond the manipulation of the written word. This is another reason why effective communication between partners is so important.

To gain further understanding of the partnership approach, let's take an example from outside the publishing field. Say, instead of writing books you were an inventor of board games and that you have developed a new game that you are sure is going to make a million dollars. Having secured your rights, you fly to New York and call on a major toy manufacturer. The manufacturer could buy your idea outright, but let's say you can't agree on what it's worth, so you decide to enter into a joint venture, perhaps having decided more developmental work is required.

Okay, you're both assuming some risk and you're both willing to invest time and resources. How do you structure the deal? If the manufacturer thought he could get away with it, he might present you with a contract, giving you a specified percent of net sales. But since you see yourself as a partner, not a seller, you're reluctant to make such a deal without looking closely at the facts and asking lots of questions.

Perhaps the manufacturer sees that you're a serious business person and treats you as such. Accordingly, he brings his plan to the negotiating table. He has done an

analysis of the market. He informs you about the competition and has estimates of the demand for your game. You discuss production levels and pricing. Advertising campaigns, sales goals, break-even points and profit margins are discussed. In a word, your partner shares all the relevant information, thus informing you of the basis for his proposal, telling you how and why he came up with the plan he has put on the table.

Maybe the offer is a good deal and maybe it isn't. Maybe the manufacturer is a good businessman and maybe he's not. Say you'd already sold another game to him previously. How did that one do? Did you get a sheet of paper covered with vague figures reflecting sales and a check appended to it? Or were you privy to all the information on the venture that your partner himself had? Did the two of you sit down and evaluate what happened? Was the game you invented flawed or was it not designed, manufactured and marketed properly? Were you an involved partner, or were you cut out of the loop?

My point is obvious. Writers go into deals under circumstances that no right-thinking business person would remotely consider. But most of us aren't MBAs. We may not even wish to deal with some of the business aspects of the venture. Some of us quail at the thought of doing anything but put pen to paper. Still, as equal partners, there are certain things we can reasonably expect, not the least of which is *accountability*.

A publisher reading this might groan at the thought of having to do so much hand-holding. Writers are difficult enough to deal with already, they say. If we have to involve them in everything we do, if only running things past them, it will be a nightmare.

Granted, there will be need for some adjusting at first, a change of attitude and a change of procedure. Another name will have to be added to the project memos as a minimum, but I think publishers will be surprised how easy most writers will be to deal with once they feel they are a part of the enterprise and fully informed. In fact, if systematized, the process might go even more smoothly than the random, bumbling, antagonist system under which most publishers presently operate. What, then, are the characteristics of this new "partnership" approach I am suggesting?

First, the writer should know on what basis an offer is made, what the assumptions are, as well as the expectations and risks. Second, the writers should expect the publisher to share all relevant information on the book's performance in a timely fashion, including print runs, orders, sell-through data, anecdotal information from marketing

The writer should expect the publisher to share all relevant information.

and so forth. To give the writer perspective, the publisher should review the performance of her book in comparative terms, doing postmortems by looking at the work in comparison with previous projects and other books on the list (anonymously, if necessary).

Publishers do not make decisions about writers and projects in a vacuum, and writers shouldn't be expected to, either. The point is, one partner shouldn't have a monopoly on information about the joint venture. If a writer is fully informed, she will both understand and trust what the publisher does and says. She will feel as though she has been treated honestly, fairly.

What's in it for the publisher who is wise enough to undertake such a policy? The answer is simple—writer loyalty. Trust between publisher and writer, built on a foundation of honesty and open communication, is the key to reformation of the system and unparalleled success for all concerned. The company that employs this simple formula will capture the industry. To return to our metaphor, the Martian who learns Venusian-think and Venusian-speak will win her heart.

Every Venusian has a wish list. Priorities will vary. Mine starts with a desire for a clear understanding of where I stand over on planet Mars. A royalty statement that tells everything you need to know and a lot more besides is a good place to start. Most statements hide more than they tell. It's bad enough that writers must rely on the publisher's data to begin with. Obscuring what's happening only adds insult to injury. And it violates the spirit of partnership.

Information is useful only to the extent it explains decisions and enables the parties to understand results. If publishers are to paint a comprehensive picture for their writer partners they must hold nothing back (including negatives). Putting things into perspective is vitally important. Comparative data may be more important than anything else. If Jane is a C+ writer and the comparative sales figures prove it, show her. If I'm Jane, this is what I want to hear: "These are your sales figures, here's how it compares to other writers. (I don't need names, code numbers will do.) You have to perform like this to warrant the kind of money you're asking for. Our projections are this, our expectations are that," and so forth.

If that isn't laughter I hear in New York, it's an indignant harrumph. "Be that honest? Never. It would cause pandemonium." Again, nineteenth century thinking. It's the sort of rationale that kept women in the drawing room while men went off to smoke their cigars and discuss business. Yes, there is need for growth on both sides, but I think writers would be much more compliant, loyal, cooperative, accepting and accommodating if they thought they were getting the straight scoop and a fair deal. Partners, after all, have a common stake and common interests.

I personally will accept whatever I believe to be true, whatever I consider just and fair. I believe most writers feel that way as well. It will be an enlightened publisher who comes to understand that.

There will be writers who read this with a distinct feeling of uneasiness. Hey, they say, I write books. I have no interest in flying off to New York (even figuratively) to negotiate a deal. That's why God made agents.

To this I say you will always be the chief executive of your writing enterprise, regardless of how much authority you delegate. All executives do not work the same way. Ronald Reagan slept through meetings at the White House, but managed to make decisions. Some of us will rely on our advisors more than others. Ultimately, we have responsibility not only for our own business, but we have a certain amount of responsibility to each other and to our craft.

The publishing business is in a woeful state, especially with respect to relations between the two principal parties in interest—writers and publishers. Agents have limited roles. They see their function as buffers, mediators, deal makers. We cannot expect them to take the lead in reforming the industry.

If there is to be change in the way things are done, the impetus will most likely have to come from us. We must begin by reforming

ourselves, becoming more businesslike. We must begin to ask hard questions and make our desires known. We must make clear that our wish is for the success of our joint enterprise. Writers and publishers are, after all, in this together. We both have much to gain and much to lose.

In sum, this is not a call to arms, but rather a call to understanding. If we in the industry engage in open and honest discourse, then perhaps we not only can do a better job of writing and selling books, perhaps we can have a little more fun along the way. That, it seems to me, is an objective worthy of the book publishing gods, be they from Mars or Venus. **NINK**

Ronn Kaiser is a former lawyer and business consultant who has written mysteries, plays and screenplays in his own name and is the co-author of several mainstream women's books with his wife, romance writer Janice Sutcliffe-Kaiser. Ronn's latest book, *Fair Game*, a March release, is a woman in jeopardy novel published by MIRA Books under the name Janice Kaiser. Last Night in Rio, his next novel, also from MIRA under the name Janice Kaiser, is due out in November.

We cannot expect agents to take the lead in reforming the industry.

Amy Stout Leaves Roc — More Musical Editors in SF/F

The science fiction/fantasy field has just lost another editor. Amy Stout, who headed the Roc line at Penguin USA, departed on short notice in March, citing personal reasons. Together with her husband (horror writer Alan Rodgers) and three children, she has relocated from New York City to Eugene, Oregon; her future career plans, if any, haven't been mentioned.

The Roc imprint was begun in 1991, shortly after Penguin acquired New American Library and began the transformation to Penguin USA. Roc, which collected all the horror, fantasy and science fiction at Penguin USA under a single name, was initially under the direction of John Silbersack. Silbersack left in 1993 to take charge of the science fiction line at Warner Books, but this was only a temporary situation—he moved on a year later to head HarperPrism, the new HarperCollins SF line.

Silbersack was succeeded at Roc by his assistant, Chris Schelling; however, Schelling was fired after a fairly brief tenure and replaced by Amy Stout, formerly of Bantam.

Who will replace Stout is unknown at this time.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the SF field, Warner replaced John Silbersack with Betsy Mitchell, formerly of Bantam, who has created the Warner Aspect imprint.

Janna Silverstein, formerly of Bantam, was hired by Wizards of the Coast, the gaming company responsible for the notoriously addictive card game "Magic: The Gathering," to create a book division. However, in the last few months WOTC has reconsidered their plans for expansion and laid off Silverstein and several other employees.

The astute reader will have noticed that Bantam has been supplying a lot of experienced editors for other science fiction publishers in recent years. This is because Bantam Spectra cut staff drastically not long ago, and not everyone who survived the purge chose to stay in the depleted editorial department. Bantam is allegedly planning to replace at least one of the departed, but has been "looking" for a year and a half now without hiring anyone.

— Lawrence Watt-Evans

Coming Soon:

Book-Renting and Other Atrocities
Laptop Shopping Guide
Book Buy-Backs
Conference Updates
Dispatches from the Front
East of the Hudson

Some Fun/Useful Sites on the Net

Writers on the Internet — This is the first place you should go with your credits list in hand. It's slow to load, so don't get impatient.

<http://www.writers.net>

Discovery Channel

<http://www.discovery.com/>

History Channel

<http://www.historychannel.com/>

Amazon.com online bookstore — over 1 million titles

<http://www.amazon.com>

Directory of Royal Genealogical Data

<http://www.dcs.ac.uk/public/genealogy/royal/catalog.html>

General Reference works

<http://www.yahoo.com/References/tree.html>

Voting records

<http://www.timeinc.com/cgi.bin/congress-votes>

Genealogy

http://www.yahoo.com/Social_Science/History/Genealogy

Computer games - Games Domain

<http://www.gamesdomain.co.uk/>

Everything about weather

<http://cirrus.spri.umich.edu/wxnet/>

Here are a couple of very strange ones:

Leonard's Cam World — people all over the world have videocams hooked to their computers. See what they see: the front entrance to the Berlin train station, the St. Louis Arch, a busy street in Hong Kong and scores of other places.

<http://www.jaxnet.com/~len/camera.html>

The Dead People Server — famous people, alive or dead?

<http://web.syr.edu/~rsholmes/dead/index.html>

Highway 17 — Page of Shame — a guy in California takes pictures of idiot drivers, showing their license plates, telling what driving idiocy they were committing and bestowing the Jerque du Jour Award.

http://www.got.net/~egallant/the_road.html

Usenets:

Quilting - REC.CRAFTS.TEXTILES.QUILTING

Bonsai - REC.ARTS.BONSAI

And lots of weird stuff, like **ALT.SEX**, **UNNATURAL-ACTS.JESSE-HELMS**, which I haven't the courage to look at.

Listserve:

DOROTHYL - mystery lovers. Send e-mail to **LISTSERVE@KENTVM.DENT.EDU** and in body of note say only **SUBSCRIBE DOROTHYL YOURFIRSTNAME YOURLASTNAME**

FORENS-L - discussion of forensic matters. Send e-mail to **MAILSERV@ACC.FAU.EDU** and in body of note say only **SUBSCRIBE FORENS-L YOURFIRSTNAME YOURLASTNAME** — *Compiled by Janice Young Brooks*

Tips for Playing Nice in Cyberspace

by

JANICE YOUNG BROOKS

The etiquette of the Internet is called Netiquette. You'll eventually stumble across one of several entertaining versions of it, but here are a few of the basic terms and "rules" of discussion groups and usenets.

Flaming: this is attacking someone personally for what they've said rather than arguing on the basis of ideas. It also happens frequently when someone comes into a group and immediately makes a bunch of "newbie" mistakes. Imagine someone gate-crashing a NINC conference and asking if the manuscript really has to be typed.

The first mistake you can make is to leap in without lurking for a while and getting a sense of the group. This, like many of the rules, is just common courtesy. Many groups post a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) which you should always read before jumping in. If the group has established a rule that abortion, for instance, is a taboo subject, you won't win friends by bringing it up and you might get yourself permanently locked out of the group.

This is a purely written medium, which we, as writers, should be better at than the average person. But keep in mind that nobody can see your smile or hear your laughing tone of voice. If a comment is meant as a joke, you'll often see people append a <g> (stands for grin and has many variations such as <bg> for big grin and <bseg> which is obscene but good-natured). Another method is a "smiley." :) (tilt your head to the left to see the smiley face). There are dozens of variations of smileys.

There are also a great many abbreviations in common use. A few are:

IMHO = in my humble opinion (IMNSHO = in my not so humble opinion)

BTW = by the way

AWS = as we speak (EAWS = even as we speak)

FWIW = for what it's worth

YMMV = your mileage may vary (I'm not saying this applies to everyone)

RTFM = read the f*cking manual (in technical discussions, usually self-directed as in "I RTFM, but I still don't understand...")

Another newbie mistake that raises hackles is typing all in caps. There's no way to underline on the Internet, so caps are reserved for emphasis and a whole sentence in caps is considered "shouting."

Many programs allow you to automatically quote the note you're replying to. Use this very sparingly and with great caution. Quote only the relevant part, if anything. I go berserk when I'm paying download time and someone has quoted all the headers, dates, carbon copy lists, the note itself and sixteen lines of adorable signature and then says by way of reply, "I agree." I'm on a listserve that comes as a digest—50 or so notes a day in one e-mail.

Every now and then somebody stupidly tries to quote one note and quotes the ENTIRE digest.

The fur really flies when this happens. Quoting also puts a symbol in front of each line quoted, so when the original line was the full screen width, the last word gets shoved onto a new line by itself. This can result in a quoted note that has a line of type, a line with one word, another line of type, another with one word, etc. Almost impossible to read and very annoying.

Keep your notes short and to the point.

Remember that the Internet is international. Don't make comments like "All we good Americans...." unless you're sure everyone reading it is American.

Back to lurkers for a moment—many people only lurk. They read and never post. You don't have any idea who they are unless it's a closed forum. One netiquette guide suggests that you reread every note before sending it and imagine your boss, your minister and your worst enemy reading it.

To that, I would add, "somebody else's attorney." Copyright law hasn't caught up with the Internet yet, so current copyright law still holds. The writer of a note is the owner of it. It may be really funny or terribly deep and you can't wait to share it with another group, but get written permission from the owner of the work. If you can't determine who wrote it, stay safe and legal and don't copy it. Giving credit to the author doesn't make it legal to copy it.

Unfortunately, few people on the net have the faintest understanding or interest in copyright and honestly believe if it's posted anywhere, it's public domain. This isn't true, but intelligent, educated, well-meaning, law-abiding people believe this. So don't post anything you wouldn't want copied far and wide.

It's a fact of life that there's virtually nothing you can say that won't offend someone. Some of these people are going to reach for their flame-throwers and toast you at the slightest provocation—or none at all. Don't try to reason or argue with them. If you can see some justification for their anger, apologize briefly and let it go. If you can't, just hit the delete key and move on.

Usenets (newsgroups), chat groups and e-mail loops can be great fun and/or provide a huge amount of valuable information, but they're a bit like going to a foreign country. If you take the time to learn the social customs, you'll be welcomed and enjoy yourself. **NINK**

Janice Young Brooks writes cozy mysteries for Avon as Jill Churchill. Her upcoming titles are *Silence of the Hams* (Avon paper in July) and *War and Peas* (Avon hardcover in November).



Editor, Agent List Growing for Conference

It's early yet—only the first of April (and snowing here in Vermont)—but I'm happy to report that a number of agents and editors have confirmed that they will be joining us in Baltimore. Here's the list to date:

Agents

- ♦ Linda Hayes and Kathryn Jensen, Columbia Literary Associates
- ♦ Karen Solem, Writers House
- ♦ Helen Breitweiser, William Morris Agency
- ♦ Damaris Rowland, The Damaris Rowland Agency
- ♦ Steven Axelrod, The Axelrod Agency
- ♦ Ethan Ellenberg, The Ethan Ellenberg Agency
- ♦ Ricia Mainhardt, the Ricia Mainhardt Agency

Editors

- ♦ Nita Taublib, Associate Publisher, Bantam Books
- ♦ Carrie Feron, Avon Books
- ♦ Ellen Edwards, Avon Books
- ♦ Claire Zion, Warner Books
- ♦ Jennifer Enderlin, St. Martin's Press
- ♦ Carolyn Marino, HarperPaperbacks
- ♦ Leslie Wainger, Silhouette Books
- ♦ Dianne Moggy, MIRA
- ♦ Judith Stern Palais, Berkley Publishing Group
- ♦ Elisa Wares, Ballantine Publishing
- ♦ Sarah Gallick, Kensington Publishing
- ♦ Candy Lee, Publisher and VP, Harlequin Enterprises

Please keep in mind that this is a preliminary list. If you don't see your editor or agent on it, by all means

let them know you're coming and invite them to attend. Have them call me with any questions.

Speaking of questions...I can only report to you what's been confirmed and, in some cases, approved by the Board. Stuff's happening behind the scenes (i.e., we're working hard here!). If you're on the fence about coming to Baltimore—if you've never attended a NINC conference and want to know how it works—please, please don't hesitate to contact me. I'll answer what questions I can, let you know anything that's in the works and give you any updates. Remember, by the time you read this, we'll have another month's work done on this conference.

Another way to get up-to-the-minute information is to check the NINC maillist. I'm on it, and I'll report on the conference as further details develop. But here, again, are the basics:

October 17-20

1996 Novelists, Inc. National Annual Conference
The Radisson Plaza Lord Baltimore Hotel
Baltimore, Maryland
800-333-3333 / 410-539-8400

See you there!

Carla Neggers
2 Hillcrest Road, Springfield VT 05156
(802) 885-3006
CNeggers@aol.com

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 NINC issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

New Applicants

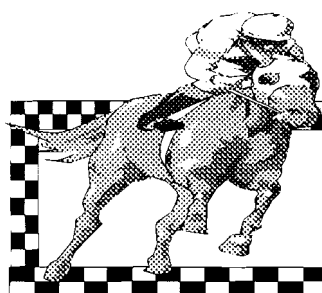
Christy Cohen, Boise ID
Annette Mahon, Paradise Valley AZ

New Members

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

CORRECTION

Bertrice Small's novel *Hellion* stayed on the *USA Today* list four weeks instead of three as reported in April's "Fast Track" column. It placed #79 on Feb. 4; #62 on Feb. 11; #91 on Feb. 18 and #126 on Feb. 25.



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	March 3	March 10	March 17	March 24	March 31
Trisha Alexander	<i>A Bride for Luke</i>		125			
Beverly Barton	<i>Blackwood's Woman</i>				117n	
Mary Lynn Baxter	<i>Saddle Up</i>				125n	
Annette Broadrick	<i>The Groom, I Presume?</i>			163n	89	
Sandra Brown	<i>Tempest in Eden</i>	65	109			
Lori Copeland	<i>Bridal Lace and Buckskin</i>		192n	107		
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Cove</i>	4	9	13	18	18
Christina Dodd	<i>Once a Knight</i>				118n	
Tami Hoag	<i>Guilty as Sin</i>	66	55	89	72	31
Tami Hoag	<i>Night Sins</i>	150	146			
Joan Hohl	<i>Another Spring</i>	122				
Katherine Kingsley	<i>In the Wake of the Wind</i>	129				
Connie Laux	<i>R.L. Stine's Ghosts of Fear Street #7: Fright Knight</i>			131n	100	131
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Autumn Lover</i>		18n	9	20	27
Teresa Medeiros	<i>Breath of Magic</i>	64	130			
Jennifer Mikels	<i>Expecting: Baby</i>		117n			
Linda Lael Miller	<i>Pirates</i>			65n	94	150
Pamela Morsi	<i>Simple Jess</i>		79n	77		
Laurie Paige	<i>Molly Darling</i>		83n			
Heather Graham Pozzessere	<i>Down in New Orleans</i>				93n	
Amanda Quick	<i>Mystique</i>		23n	15	37	61
Nora Roberts	<i>The Fall of Shane MacKade</i>	78n	33			
Nora Roberts	<i>Montana Sky</i>			51n	56	73
Lass Small	<i>Stranger in Texas</i>				129n	

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



EAST OF THE HUDSON

I Didn't Know That, Ollie!

Did you know that bookstores, particularly chain bookstores, sell their bestseller slots and prime display areas?

If you knew that, you were one step ahead of the *New York Times*' ace publishing reporter, Mary B.W. Tabor. Ms. Tabor delivered that flash earlier this year and I, for one, am still trying to find some "news" value in it.

Ms. Tabor's "expose" began with a heart-rending anecdote involving Lynn Snowden, a Manhattan writer who found her well-reviewed literary novel, *Nine Lives*, on a back shelf at the biggest Barnes & Noble superstore east of the Hudson. Wishing to sell a few more copies, she asked a clerk to move it up to the front of the store.

The clerk refused, causing this unusually sensitive author to literally burst into tears. "It was horrible," she told the crusading reporter from the NYT. "It was like my book wasn't good enough."

Crusading investigative journalist Tabor undertook to right this wrong, or at least to find out why the clerk wouldn't move *Nine Lives* from the pet section to the display counter beside the cash register. What she found was that such prime merchandising space is, gasp, for sale, gasp, to the highest bidder.

This, my friends, is not news.

Anybody who's been in mass-market publishing for more than a week knows bestseller slots and front-line display areas are regularly sold.

Anybody who's ever had a lead or super-lead title knows that publishers purchase those ten or fifteen "Bestseller" strips in your supermarket or drugstore. The practice is called "incentivizing"—a fancy name for shaving a few extra points off the price the rack jobber or independent distributor is charged for the book—but it's commerce, just the same.

Any veteran of the romance wars knows that dump display space in front of your Walden's mall store or your local B. Dalton is leased to publishers, month by month, in the chain store's never-ending effort to squeeze an extra nickel or two out of the business.

Everybody knew that, apparently, except Mary B. W. Tabor.

Ms. Tabor did dig up some interesting facts, once she got over her shock and amazement. For instance, she discovered that promotion is not cheap. An end-cap display in the Barnes & Noble superstore chain will cost \$3,000 a month per title, or \$10,000 a month for the entire display.

Bestseller display in the front of the B. Dalton chain costs \$12,000 a month and space on the "new arrival" wall runs you \$2,500 for three weeks.

In other words, a publisher may spend more acquiring

good display for a paperback original than he or she spent on the manuscript in the first place. Now, *that's* shocking.

But the rest of the piece was amazingly uninspired.

At least it seemed that way to me until I reread it and began to sense the subtext. In truth, the story was another chapter in the ongoing battle between the independents and the chains. It was, in its own lame way, an effort to discredit chains as merchants of literary mediocrity.

In about the twentieth paragraph, Tabor finally got around to what was really bothering her and, presumably, the editors of the *New York Times*.

There the story suggested that the chains have an unfair advantage over independents, since Borders or Barnes & Noble can make money on placement in the national marketing arena while Ye Olde Independent Shakespearean Bookstore in East Hooterville cannot.

In the same vein, Tabor, quoting independent booksellers, took the position that there was something inherently more noble about independent stores pushing their own favorite authors than there is in publishers spending money to promote the authors *they* want to see succeed in a big way.

The chains and superstores are auctioning off literary taste, betraying the canon of literary excellence for thirty silver-clad copper sandwich coins of the contemporary realm. Or so it seems to Tabor.

Just beneath the surface of the piece, I caught a whiff of underripe grapes from East of the Hudson. Independents used to set the literary agenda for the country by selecting and promoting "good" books. The independents, along with the *New York Times Book Review* section, decided what was worthwhile, entirely without concern for their own economic or cultural interests.

Then along came the folks from the superstores, the category-killers who control display space in several thousand venues all over the country. They are merchandisers, not literary mavens, and they work to maximize their profits in any way they can. They are in the process of changing the literary landscape of the country by tapping a readership that just didn't exist before. The big losers are the independents and the kinds of books the independents love to sell.

The losers were folks like Lynn Snowden, whose novel received warm praise in New York and then died on the vine, selling fewer than 11,000 copies.

I've tried to say it before: the culture is changing, for better or for worse. We who write popular fiction in all its various forms have been shunted off to the literary ante-room for a long time, mostly by the New York literary establishment and by independent booksellers who refuse to carry our work because it's "only genre fiction, after all."

I know and I like a great many independent booksellers. Even if I don't always agree with their literary



EAST OF THE HUDSON

taste, I admire their guts. Selling books is a hell of a hard way to make a living.

Additionally, as a personal matter, I loathe corporate power. I was never so happy as the day I turned in my last timecard to my corporate lords and masters and told them to kiss my cheeks.

But I have recognized for a long time that the power in the world of publishing and bookselling resides in the hands of the corporations, whether they be publishers or booksellers. We writers are for the most part powerless in this process; clinging to the rosy romantic notion that we and the independent booksellers of the world are dictating literary tastes—much less reading tastes—is a dangerous delusion.

I love to write. Books are my life. But they call it the book business because it's business, not some occult priesthood. I've always known that. It's just flat amazing to me that the *New York Times* didn't.

How could such a great newspaper (my favorite, actually) have overlooked the change on its own doorstep?

You Do the Math

Anybody who is hostage to bestseller lists ought to get a wicked little kick out of new developments in the music business. Over the last few years, that business has been revolutionized by Soundscan, a system which actually counts the numbers for records sold.

A bestseller is a bestseller because it actually outsells its competitors across the board.

What a concept!

But the *New York Times* reported recently that record companies have developed ways to get around Soundscan.

For instance, record promoters have discovered which small independent record stores report their sales to Soundscan. Targeting those stores with all kinds of freebies and gimmicks, the record companies have managed to raise the profiles of some of their releases and artists.

Sound familiar? Sound anything like the case last year involving a nonfiction book that was boosted onto the *New York Times* bestseller list by what appeared to be targeted bulk purchases of the book at bookstores which report their sales to the *Times*' Bestseller list?

Soundscan officials say their system is still far more accurate than the old methods of charting bestselling records, but they admit there are a few glitches.

"One of the things that we've learned is, you build a better mousetrap and all of a sudden the mouse starts finding ways to get around your trap," one of them told the *Times*.

Interestingly, the *Times* itself has taken steps to prevent recurrence of the raid on its list. The list now tracks

"bulk sales" of books at its reporting stores. Books whose performance may have been boosted by such sales are marked with a typographical device called a dagger.

Interestingly, the system has yielded mixed results. For instance, the March 3 bestseller list for hardcovers marked one novel and three nonfiction titles with daggers: The novel was *The Celestine Prophecy* and the nonfiction numbers were books by Dr. Laura Schlesinger, Microsoft's Bill Gates and Sen. Bill Bradley.

The paperback lists were another matter, though. One novel, Dave Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, was marked. So were ten of the first sixteen titles on the nonfiction list. The daggered books included such diverse titles as self-help books like M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and germ thrillers like *The Hot Zone* and *The Coming Plague*.

I'm not sure what the term "bulk sales" really means if more than half the books on a single list fall into the category. Similarly, I'm not sure which bookstores reported said suspect sales or how many copies were sold.

That's the problem with lists in general, and I mean all of them, not just the Grand Old Dame, the *New York Times*. The relative ranking of sales leaves so many questions unanswered. Without access to actual raw numbers, none of us can be sure what's really happening. Without a complete list of stores whose figures go to make up the list, we're still blind men grabbing hold of an elephant.

I did see one idea in practice not long ago that was unique: The *Toronto Globe and Mail*, a well-respected Canadian paper, prints its weekly bestseller list based on actual cash-register sales in national chains and retail outlets.

But to address the issue of independent bookstore sales, it reports actual cash-register sales for the week at a particular and named independent bookstore somewhere in the country.

In other words, the *Globe and Mail* shows you its hole card. The week I saw the list, the selected independent was in some small town on the prairie in Alberta and its sales were significantly different than the national list.

The system may not be as sophisticated as the one the *New York Times* uses. One store's sales are bound to be different from the sales of several thousand stores, which is what the *Times* purports to use.

But the *Times* is still loading its figures by making some independents more equal than others, and then frustrating anyone who questions the loaded dice by refusing to disclose the identity of the favored stores.

I guess it's just the remaining part of me that thinks like a reporter, but I'd sure like to know.

— Evan Maxwell

Tea with Miss Marple

Okay, so I didn't really have tea with Miss Marple. But we are fiction writers, so I stretched the truth a little. Just the facts—I was fortunate to spend some time with British mystery author P.D. James recently, and we did have dinner.

Baroness James of Holland Park, as Queen Elizabeth titled P.D. James when creating her a life peer of the United Kingdom, was one of my fellow faculty members at the University of South Florida Writer's Conference in February. When I read this international bestselling writer would be there, I only hoped to get to meet her.

But we sat together at the faculty dinner; I attended her workshop on "The Novel of Mystery and Suspense," and managed a few follow-up questions the next day. In short, I should have paid the organizers of the conference to let me teach there, instead of the other way around.

Lady James is totally delightful, terribly British and an amazing writer. She tells you up front that she is 75 years old and proud of it, although she wishes she "had got in the swim of things in publishing a bit earlier." However, *Original Sin*, which is on the U.S. bestseller lists now, is her 14th novel.

When she could afford in more ways than one to take it easy, Lady James is very dedicated: even on this two-week trip to the States in southwest Florida in February, she worked several hours every morning. She was just "getting to know" her characters for her next book, she said. She does admit, though, that the genesis for each of her novels comes from setting—then characters and plot grow from that.

In alternating breaths, she discussed her grandchildren and her novels with great love. She has many delightful anecdotes about the writing life which reveal her humor and wit—as well, I think, show her to be just one of us:

"My mother," she said, "once despairingly asked, 'My

by

KAREN HARPER

dear, why don't you write a nice story about nice people? Perhaps about a handsome doctor who marries his nurse...'

" 'Mother,' I said, 'if I tried to do that, she'd soon be poisoning him and he'd be after her with a scalpel.' "

In her workshop, which was cheek-by-jowl with admiring fans and writers, Lady James made some of the following comments. I know I was hanging on her every word, especially since my recent transition to contemporary suspense after writing 22 historicals:

- ♦ There is a great advantage to writing a multiple viewpoint novel, but stick to three or four POVs, or you can't do justice to each.

- ♦ Four suspects works well; five is too many, because they all need attention.

- ♦ Don't delay the murder too long in your book, but don't feel you necessarily have to begin with it.

- ♦ It works well to have a second murder "in the middle."

- ♦ In a mystery, you cannot let your characters run away with your story as they might in other genres.

- ♦ Never slight setting in suspense. If the setting seems real to the reader, the story will, too.

- ♦ A little humor to lighten a mystery works wonders.

- ♦ And now, "in that April" as spring comes to the "sceptered isle," I picture Baroness James of Holland Park rising early each morn to work on her next novel, either at her historic home in London or her country house near Cambridge. I imagine her taking a sip of her Earl Grey, smiling over the creation of her characters—and killing them off for everyone's enjoyment. **NINK**

Karen Harper's latest novel, *Dark Road Home*, from Signet was released in March of this year. Her next contemporary suspense, *The Black Orchid*, will appear in December.

For a one-year subscription to *Novelists' Ink*, send your request and \$50.00 to Novelists, Inc.

Editors and agents can subscribe for \$35.00.

P.O. Box 1166, Mission KS 66222-1166.

For membership information and application, send your request to the P.O. Box.

Novelists' Ink

Novelists, Inc.

An organization for writers of popular fiction

P.O. Box 1166

Mission KS 66222-0166

Publishing Services by Sandy Huseby

FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FARGO ND
PERMIT #281