

# Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 7, Number 6

June 1996

## And the [Reporting] Beat Goes On....

After Deborah Camp and her committee finished their survey, Barnes & Noble increased their presence in the used-book business. According to an article in the Detroit Free Press sent in by member Susan Wiggs, a superstore which opened in April in Rochester Hills, Michigan, includes a 3,000-square-foot used-book section. The article said Barnes & Noble also plans to open two more stores that include used books, one in Wisconsin and the other in outstate New York. The company's flagship store in Manhattan has been selling used books for more than 50 years.

Manager of the Rochester Hills store, Janice Keramedjian, is quoted in the article as saying that the used-book section is "definitely a profit center," and not simply a convenience for customers. The store will be buying hardcovers and paperbacks.

NINK is checking into the ramifications of this move on the part of the nation's largest bookseller. A more detailed account will follow in a future issue. Stay tuned!

VLT

## Book-Renting and Other Atrocities

It's a common nightmare—the specter of booksellers obtaining a copy of your book, possibly at reduced book-club prices, and then renting it. Over and over and over. Then there's the other nightmare of going into store after store, and discovering that no one carries your book. Deborah Camp and her sleuthing Advocacy Committee went down into the dark marketplace cellars that harbor our worst nightmares. Here are the tales they brought back:

We kept hearing reports of some book stores (primarily those carrying used books) renting new hardbacks and advance reader copies (ARCs) to their customers. These rumors crop up frequently and we felt there must be some truth to them. While we found no book store operators who would admit to renting ARCs, a couple of them said they had heard of other book store managers who did. The managers we spoke to understood that ARCs are not for sale and for review only. The persistent rumor is that used-book store owners rent out ARCs to their best customers as rewards for

by  
**DEBORAH CAMP**  
Advocacy Committee Chair

their patronage, but we found no evidence of this.

As for renting

out hardbacks, this is not merely a rumor. This, unfortunately, is fact. One bookseller said it was the same thing libraries do, but we pointed out that libraries buy in bulk. The same can't be said about bookstores, especially independents and those selling used books.

The Last Chapter Bookstore in Overland Park, KS, proudly announced in its newsletter the *Rent-A-Book for a Buck* program. Including comments from its customers concerning the success of this program, the Last Chapter explained that for a dollar per day (\$3 minimum), its customers may choose from a wide selection of fiction and nonfiction current bestsellers. The nine-month experiment was a success, and they are adding more current bestsellers to their lists. This is an author-friendly store, although this particular practice isn't too neighborly!

A survey taker in Colorado Springs reports that *Hooked On Books* "definitely sells ARCs. I was there and saw them." She adds that at least one stripped copy of one of her own books was sold there.

In Lancaster, PA, a B.Dalton bookseller told one of our questioners that he had been asked by his customers if they could pay to read any of the ARCs he received. He was quick to insist he never does this, but assumes this must be going on somewhere or

(continued on page 7)

### In This Issue

President's Column .....	2
Letters to the Editor .....	3
Discovering Our Roots .....	9
Baltimore Conf—It Takes a Team .....	10
Dispatches: Top Ten Things Not to Say .....	11
The Fast Track .....	12
East of the Hudson .....	13
Prostitutes and Pimps .....	15
Wal-Mart, Zebra Launch Romances .....	16

## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

### Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyn†	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

### New York, New York (Opinions Needed)

As I write this in early May, our Site Committee has just returned from New York City where they sited possible hotels for our 1997 conference. While we don't have their final report yet, we can say that it looks like we'll be in New York in '97. Whether or not and how soon we go back to New York after that, however, is up to you. Before we set anything in stone, we'd like to know what the members think about how often we should hold our conference in The Big Apple, so we've included a postcard with this issue of *NINK* for you to express your opinion. Please do so—the more people who vote, the better idea we will have of what the members really want.

### Free Money

Thought that would get your attention! Some people have been wondering where NINC got the money to finance several of the very expensive projects we're doing this year. That money comes from the Authors Coalition, a group of writers' organizations that has been entrusted with distributing the reprographic royalties from Norway. The copyright laws in other parts of the world differ from ours in that they allow copyrighted material to be photocopied if royalties are paid on those copies. Distributing these royalties to the individual authors, however, has proven problematic in many cases, and until recently, that money has simply been held by the individual countries. Two years ago, the Coalition was formed to distribute the unclaimed money from Norway to the member writers' organizations to be used for the direct benefit of writers.

A few months ago, you received an invitation to register with the Author's Registry which will facilitate the distribution of these foreign monies directly to the authors who should receive them. In the meantime, however, thousands of dollars are being distributed to NINC and the other groups, and this is the money we are using to finance projects like the Agent Survey and the Lottery Audit, and to pay for the lead articles in *NINK*. These are things we could never hope to accomplish without the Coalition monies—unless we significantly increased your dues—and we thought you should know how we can afford to do them now.

### Lottery Audit

And speaking of the Audit, we have recently learned that we will have to send our auditor to Switzerland to examine Harlequin's books. Fortunately—and thanks to the Coalition—we have the funds to do so, which an individual author might not. We will keep you updated on the progress of the audit.

### This Month from the President:

- New York: Possible site for the 1997 Conference
- Free Money! NINC gets extra income
- Lottery Audit Update
- Agent Survey Update
- 1996 Conference: Things are happening

---

## Agent Surveys

The surveys have been distributed to the Survey Committee members who are compiling the results. We hope to have the finished survey booklet in the mail to you in September. This survey will also include information from the agents themselves from surveys they filled out, and we expect it will be even more useful to members searching for an agent than our last report was.

## 1996 Conference

The Conference Committee is hard at work putting the finishing touches on the conference, and they have some very exciting things planned. Check out Carla Neggers's report elsewhere in the newsletter.

— **Victoria Thompson**

## April Board Meeting Summary

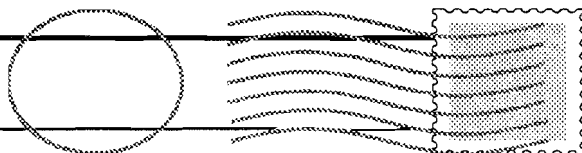
The NINC Board voted to select Scottsdale, Arizona as the site for the 1998 Conference. Julie Kistler is the Site Committee chair for 1997 and 1998. The Board also voted to survey the membership regarding future conference sites.

Membership chair Terey Daly Ramin reported to the Board that as of March, NINC had 493 members. The Board also approved a newsletter policy regarding obituaries, which will appear only for NINC members and prominent industry professionals.

**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.

## Hey Jude, Don't Take It Bad...

I've never written a Letter to the Editor before, despite a few temptations in the past. However, I simply cannot stay silent after Jude Deveraux's lashing of two writers in this column for daring to honestly respond to her March '96 article, "Do You Really Need An Agent?"

The first and primary target of her wrath, Name Withheld, received no less than a bludgeoning for reasons that

escape me. Ms. Deveraux clearly felt she had been insulted by all sorts of snide insinuations, yet I find nothing in Name Withheld's letter that qualifies for a slur against Ms. Deveraux and/or her accomplishments. The writer's only sin, if there was one committed, was to note that while Ms. Deveraux "had a lot of good and useful things to say," most of us lack the clout and ability to conduct our business from such an atypically advantageous position. True? True.

As for Laura Resnick's " 'madder-than-hell' letter (which) had a valid criticism of my article," I was left wondering, *huh?* She didn't sound mad to me. Ms. Resnick's letter was diplomatic, professional and intelligent. And, like Name Withheld, it had the feel of deference paid to Ms. Deveraux's stature. Did I detect a hint of pique with some of the writers and agents she openly disdained in her article? I did. But if any smugness was displayed, if there was an adversarial tone in anyone's words, these letters were not the source. Both writers merely pointed out the difference between apples and oranges while being quick to agree with Ms. Deveraux that her logical choice of self-representation doesn't necessarily work in situations →



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 3)

far different from her own. Since the objects of her ire were agreeing with the bottom line of the article, I fail to see the argument.

We writers tend to be a sensitive lot. That quality is often one of our greatest strengths as well as the Achilles' heel we struggle with and sometimes lose the battle to. Perhaps the sensitivity which marks Ms. Deveraux's most excellent books was also the trigger that caused her to fire off a scathing rebuke without ample provocation. Her reaction seems proof positive that she is one-of-the-girls and definitely qualifies for membership to the club. How comforting to realize even superstars aren't immune to that terrible demon within which plays on our insecurities and is wont to see enemies where there are none.

At the risk of being added to Ms. Deveraux's hit list (that's okay, I've got one, too, and I betcha so do most of you!), I'll add an observation of my own concerning the publishing machine these days: While success comes more easily to some than to others, there isn't one amongst us who hasn't worked damned hard to reach whatever rung of the ladder we're on. But let us not discount the roles dumb luck and timing play in this chameleon business. Sure I paid my dues, and I'm not through paying them yet, but I got lucky seven years ago when *The Big Break* came along (read first contract).

Time for a reality check: Were I to submit that same manuscript now, would the outcome be the same? Not likely. I do not envy the many talented writers struggling to crack our dauntingly competitive marketplace. The odds are against them, far more than they were seven years ago when I first sold. Those odds can easily be quadrupled when comparing what sold twenty years ago as opposed to the stringent standards of skill demanded to get a first book published today.

This is not to say that Ms. Deveraux's early releases lacked skill or that she didn't work as diligently as the next writer to perfect her craft. Nothing could be further from the truth. But. Would her first published book find a current buyer? Perhaps. After all, her early work shows the promise she has so richly realized as a master storyteller who creates memorable characters (my personal favorite is *A Knight in Shining Armor*). Now, assuming that she could indeed sell that first work in today's marketplace, would it command book dumps and a half million print run in an era wherein the supply of good romance writers no longer falls short of reader demand?

The answer to that question is moot. But I do think it's important for each of us to keep our perspective grounded and respect the feelings and views of others when we speak from a position of authority. I highly doubt that Ms. Deveraux takes such perks as limos for granted, but hey,

what's wrong with some selective "amnesia by leather"? While there are certainly things in all our lives and careers we'd prefer to forget, let us never cease to remember what it's like to sacrifice milk money for postage to a publisher who doesn't know us from Adam.

Now that I've said enough to make up for every Letter to the Editor I've never sent, I promise silence for another decade. This shouldn't be difficult if I get hung for defending my fellow NINC members who clearly meant no harm but were slapped silly nonetheless. Ah, what the hell, I make my living by taking risks as a writer, so here's the rope:

— *Olivia Rupprecht*

P.S. Kudos to Ronn Kaiser for the "Mars and Venus" article. Brilliant and right on!

## Of Death and Dying

Just two addenda to Evan Maxwell's excellent "East of the Hudson" column from the April issue:

*Concerning John Grisham suing his former agent's estate:*

The first seven years of my writing career, my literary agent was Jay Garon. I left him about the time Grisham found him—a trade I'm sure that was more than fair for the Garon-Brooke, Inc. Literary Agency. Jay Garon died of a pulmonary embolism on August 22, 1995.

It is interesting to me that news of the filing of Grisham's lawsuit against Jay Garon's estate has been so little reported. I read it in a blurb-type article in *USA Today* this winter and assumed *Publishers Weekly* would soon cover it in full. I read *PW* every week and never saw any mention of it as of this date in mid-April.

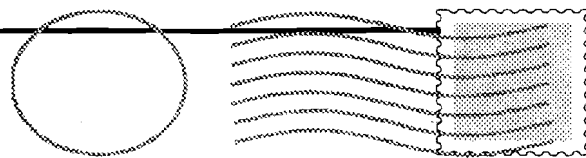
*USA Today* did report that Grisham was suing the agent's estate and Garon's lawyer for \$9 million in the year, as Evan reports, of '94-'95, when Grisham's income was \$29 million.

*Concerning PW's independent bookstore of the year selling used books:*

Evan reports correctly that Nickleby's, a Columbus, Ohio, bookstore which won the *PW* Bookseller of the Year award in 1993, in fighting for its life against the onslaught of superstores in 1995, did try to sell used books. Soon, however, Nickleby's was forced into a sell-out and is now defunct.

Aside from the used-book part of this, Nickleby's demise is sadly emblematic of the national trend of wonderful, unique independents' deaths from bigchainitis.

Nickleby's was the dream of one man who, though his occupation was ophthalmology, loved books. With a partner, he put his money and dreams in a bookstore and made it a magic place. Even before the cafés at Borders and Barnes & Noble were so popular, while you browsed at



Nickleby's, you could eat gourmet fare, usually delights from the featured cookbook of the month. Live musicians entertained.

Authors were given free drinks and desserts for author month; frequent author visits ranged the gamut from national names like P.J. O'Rourke to Vice President Dan Quayle to locals like—yes, Karen Harper. One of the best booksignings I ever had was replete with a bagpiper and Scottish Highland dancers while I signed copies of my Dutton historical novel, *The Wings of Morning*, set in Scotland.

Nickleby's also mailed a monthly newsletter listing myriad talks, programs, workshops, literary birthdays and recommended reads. The staff read voraciously, and most had special areas of expertise. In short, the place was author-reader heaven and now it's gone. Rest in peace, Nickleby's and many other dynamic independent bookstores.

— Karen Harper

## Beyond Fiction

In response to Julie Tetel Andresen's question "Is a reasonable livelihood still possible for the majority of our members in the current economic climate of the publishing industry?" I say no, it is not.

Granted everyone has a different requirement for "reasonable livelihood," and I don't really know what income bracket the majority of our membership is in. However, I saw the writing on the wall a year ago and decided to return to education and technical writing. After 10 years of publishing fiction and doing all the self-promotion I could afford to do on a limited budget, I realized that I was not headed for the *New York Times* Bestseller List.

I still enjoy fiction and even have a new publisher who has asked for another proposal, now that my first book for them is in. But I believe the fiction business is too unpredictable to depend on. With all the new technologies out there, I saw new opportunities for technical writers, script writers and editors. At first I wondered if companies that use this type of writer would take a romance novelist seriously. Nevertheless I compiled my resume including the education and technical writing I had done 15 years ago, my desktop publishing experience, articles about writing that I'd published in *The Writer* and other such magazines, and my 16 published novels.

Guess what? Multi-media and software companies were only too happy to find someone with a creative background and good editing skills who could also write how-to instruction, software manuals and so forth. At my present job I have the opportunity to learn how to write hypertext and even learn HTML (hypertext markup language), the programming language used to create Web pages. This is a big market right now, and I have decided to make hay while the sun shines. No, I'm not interested

in suffering for my art any longer. I'm going where there's less competition, better money than many midlist authors make and challenging projects. I think there's more to life than fiction, and it has been healthy to look into other corners of the world for writing opportunities and meet new people. Some of the projects and opportunities can be really quite exciting.

Right now I don't know where this may end. But if anyone else out there is tired of being shrunk along with the midlist, and you don't see yourself targeted by your publisher for the NYTBSL, consider other horizons. You might have some fun, even if you don't give up writing fiction altogether. I would be most happy to talk to NINC members who would like to give me a call to chat about specifics. In spite of bragging about my high tech job, alas I am not on the Internet, so you'll have to use the phone.

— Patricia Werner

## Different Strokes

When Pat Warren called me for her excellent (and intriguing) article on terminating an agent-client relationship, I told her how I would inform my agent and how I would want to be informed. But I'm not everybody, and a phone call doesn't mean legal nitty-gritty (which can vary) should be neglected. Not long ago, a friend decided to fire her agent of long standing and felt, given her situation, a phone call was the right thing to do. She made the call, then followed up that same day with a letter confirming their conversation. It was simple and businesslike, it satisfied my friend on both personal and legal grounds, and both parties have since maintained a professional, courteous relationship. Other friends have chosen, given *their* situation, just to send the letter; others to send the letter, *then* follow up with a phone call. Pat's article illustrated that this often difficult task can be handled acceptably in a variety of ways, depending on the individuals involved.

— Carla Neggers

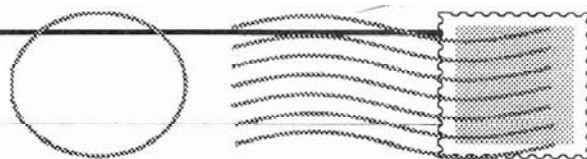
## What's Up with the How-To

I recently realized that members who didn't have the opportunity to attend the general meeting at the NINC conference in Denver had no way of knowing whatever happened to our planned how-to book.

To give a bit of background, I conceived the book as a fund-raising project in 1993 and approached Bill Brohaugh, of Writers' Digest Books, at the NINC conference in San Antonio with the idea. After some discussion, he vetoed my original concept of dividing the book into various genres and suggested a nuts and bolts approach would be more suitable.

With that in mind, I went through ten years of back issues of *Writer's Digest*, determined the subjects I believed them to be most interested in, and set about →

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



(Continued from page 5)

finding writers. Several members volunteered, all wrote a synopsis of their prospective chapters and several wrote the entire chapter, which gave us an impressive proposal to present to *Writer's Digest*. At my request, Steve Axelrod agreed to act as agent on our behalf.

Shortly before the NINC conference in Atlanta, we received word that *Writer's Digest* was impressed with the quality of writers in our project and did, indeed, want a book from us. Unfortunately, they'd decided they'd prefer a how-to-write-romance book. At the 1994 Atlanta board meeting, the Board voted to reject this offer, and *Writer's Digest* turned to RWA for the book that's now coming out this fall.

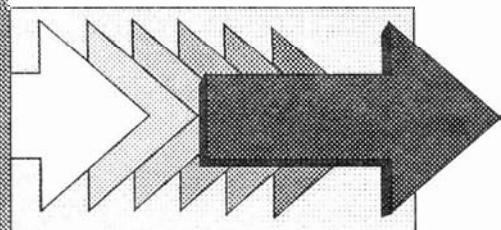
By this time several writers had dropped out of the project, citing deadline problems, but a slightly revised proposal was submitted to *The Writer* books, who subsequently turned us down. At this point, last year's Board agreed that it was time to suspend the project.

— JoAnn Ross

## Advocacy Groups Still Needed

I am one of those authors who believes in the "partners in publishing" concept. My publisher is my partner in the process of getting my book out to the public. I believe in working with them to make sure we get out a good product. I do not believe that the publisher is the enemy, out to get us, the lowly authors. I do believe that a publisher is motivated by the bottom line and will try just about anything s/he can to improve that bottom line. I believe that when we authors have legitimate complaints we need our organizations, such as NINC, RWA and Author's Guild (as well as the AAR), to represent us by taking those complaints to the publishers and saying, "This isn't right or fair." I have seen that approach make a difference, and I think it will continue to make a difference. It is far better for us to take our concerns to whatever professional committees we have so they can work toward a compromise on behalf of all writers.

— Robin Lee Hatcher



## POINT / COUNTERPOINT

This column features a particular *POINT*. Agreements and disagreements—the Counterpoint—will be published two months later to allow everyone time to respond. *POINTS* are always published anonymously to allow members to bring up controversial issues related to the writing industry without concern.

Where does an author draw the line between necessary self-promotion and bad taste? I used to think that line was fairly clear. When dealing with fans, just about anything goes. When dealing with wannabe writers, a writer uses slightly more discretion, and with other published writers, discretion is the key. At an autographing, I'm shameless. At a conference with wannabes, I make sure my books are there for sale (not by me!) and I autograph them. If I'm speaking, I make sure my book title is mentioned in my bio, and I usually use it as an example of something in my speech. I might even have a copy of it in my bag just in case somebody asks to see it. But at a conference like Novelists, Inc.'s, where all the attendees are published writers, I wouldn't be caught dead carrying my book around! After all, everybody there has a book to promote (some more than one), and these people aren't my fans, they're my peers. Would an architect carry around copies of his latest design to show at an architect's convention? I doubt it.

So those are the rules, or at least that's what I thought they were. But recently someone informed me that those are only the rules in romance circles and that the rules in other genres are different. That mystery writers aren't looked down upon for carrying their books around at conferences and might even be expected to. And that I'm the rude one for suggesting it's rude.

But there are, after all, few other conferences like NINC's, where everyone present is published. What is appropriate at other conferences where unpublished writers and fans are present really doesn't apply to NINC. I think that means that we should set our own etiquette, but what should that etiquette be?

# Book-Renting Atrocities

(Continued from page 1)

his customers would not think to ask. He also said he has seen ARCs for sale at used-book stores in his area. Used-book stores are selling and renting category romances that are not available in retail. They obtain those books through publisher book clubs, which are sent months in advance of retail sales. In October most of the used-book stores surveyed were selling/renting November- and December-release category romances.

Managers said these books cycle two or three times before the retail stores get in their shipments. Stores stock several copies of each title. Every used-book store surveyed sold October releases in all genres,

**The manager of one store made it clear that romances were not considered women's fiction. Discussion groups and other events, he explained, centered on quality fiction.**

including bestsellers, at half price during the month of October. (Of course, the authors receive no royalties from used-book sales.) One person reported she bought Shiril Henke's *Broken Vows*, which had recently arrived at the retail book outlets, for a quarter. Ouch!

Several of the used-book stores surveyed bundled whole lines of category romances for rental. For instance, in October these stores had the November and December Loveswepts bundled so that customers rented the whole line for a special price. Same thing with other lines such as Harlequin Intrigues and Silhouette Intimate Moments, etc. This practice was particularly vexing to the survey takers.

Paperback Outlet in Warren, MI, rents out both hardbacks and paperbacks. Hardbacks are rented for \$2.50 to \$3.50 for two weeks. These are both new and used books. The used paperbacks rent for \$1.65 for two weeks, which is the bulk of this store's paperback rentals. However, in October this store carried a special section (behind the counter) of November and December series romances which they rented out bundled by month. They offer a 40 percent discount on the next new book a customer buys if that customer returns the book within 14 days of purchase, 35% off if returned within 30 days. They also have books on tape for rent. Only ten percent of their inventory was new books.

The good news is that Waldenbooks and B.Dalton continue to carry a wide selection of all fiction and nonfiction. The bad news is that the new superstores, such as Barnes & Noble, do not stock category romances, for the most part, and seem resistant to do so in the future. Their stock of other genres, such as westerns and science fiction, also leaves much to be desired.

Superstores, especially Barnes & Noble, were not so super to category romance writers, although writers of other genres fared better.

None of the Barnes & Noble stores surveyed carried any category romances. When asked why, we received answers ranging from, "We don't pride ourselves on our romance section" (said with a smirk) to "I never heard of Silhouette and Harlequin." Liberties book store in Boca Raton, FL, also did not carry series romances.

Comparison shopping concluded that the romance sections in the B&N superstores were usually half the size of the mystery sections and smaller than science-fiction and fantasy sections. In one Colorado store the western section was twice as large as the romance section, although westerns usually make up the smallest division in these stores. Mysteries also enjoyed longer shelf life. Survey takers reported mystery selections dating back to 1991. All genres in B&N were reported to have extensive backlist sections. Most reported a 50/50 split between backlist and new releases.

It was also reported that activities at many of the superstores rarely included romances. Children's books enjoyed many in-store promotions. A couple of stores sponsored women's fiction events, but romances were not included. In fact, the manager of one store made it clear that romances were not considered women's fiction. Discussion groups and other events, he explained, centered on *quality fiction*. (So there!)

A Pennsylvania Borders store did not push mass market and gave the distinct feeling that they were trying to attract "upscale" customers. "I feel there is a not-so-subtle sense of intellectual snobbery in this store," the survey taker reported. "A sort of, 'Only *serious* readers need apply' atmosphere."

In another B&N store in California, the manager assured the survey taker that they did not carry romance "and never will cater to that kind of

reader." A B&N in Northern California stocked their romances under the science-fiction sign.

When this was pointed out, the employee said, "I guess we didn't know where to stick them."

The Indianapolis Borders store has a small romance section with horror and westerns receiving even less space. Science-fiction/fantasy was given four times as much space as romances, and mysteries garnered four times more space. Same thing at the B&N in that city.

Hastings in Pueblo, CO, received good marks for stocking a wide selection of all genres. Even low midlist (i.e. HarperMonogram titles) were available. Many backlist titles of lesser known authors were stocked.

In Tulsa's B&N superstore, the romance section takes up about half an aisle and consists mainly of Danielle Steel. Many older single titles were available and quite a number of reprints. Most of the new releases were →

**The Media Play superstore in Tulsa is kinder and gentler to all genres.**

# Book-Renting Atrocities

(Continued from page 7)

historicals with very few contemporary single titles. The

**The managers in the B.Dalton and Walden stores were more knowledgeable about genre fiction and titles and, generally, more eager to help by locating or ordering a specific book.**

survey taker was encouraged to write and complain to B&N headquarters (which she did and received back a form letter thanking her for her interest in Barnes & Noble).

The manager said he didn't carry category because he didn't sell enough romances to stock them. When it was pointed out that he would sell more if he stocked more, he shrugged off the advice. When it was mentioned that romances comprise almost 50 percent of paperback sales, an employee dismissed this.

"Oh, that is such an old statistic and it's not true anymore," she said. "Besides, I never believed it."

The Media Play superstore in Tulsa is kinder and gentler to all genres. The romance section began poorly, but the manager increased his stock and has scheduled a number of autographing events for romances, mysteries, westerns and science-fiction. He hosted one recently for horror writers. He is actively pursuing mass market and category customers.

Walden and B.Dalton chains continue to support mass market inventory and seem to be providing fair shelf space to all. Romance sections have suffered some with category space diminishing, but still maintained. Reprints are taking up more and more shelf space, limiting the space formerly devoted to series romances and new releases. Several managers said they are trying to provide additional shelf space by placing more romance single titles up front with the other mass market paperbacks. But all managers surveyed said the backlist titles are making them order fewer new releases and stripping series more frequently. (Some stores kept two and three months at a time before

stripping, but can't devote the shelf space anymore.)

Mystery sections were, on average, a bit smaller than romance sections at these stores and the same size as science-fiction/fantasy/horror/occult. Westerns were given half an aisle or less. It should be noted that since sf/fantasy/horror/occult are combined in one section, these books are not actually getting more space than mysteries, which don't even have to share space with suspense or thrillers in some stores.

The managers in the B.Dalton and Walden stores were more knowledgeable about genre fiction and titles and, generally, more eager to help by locating or ordering a specific book.

A recent (early January) check in with a few of the stores found that little or nothing had changed in the Borders, Barnes & Noble and Liberties stores. However, several of the survey takers said that Media Play and Hastings stores in their areas were stocking more genre fiction. Only one Colorado B&N in Aurora was found to carry series romance among those surveyed.

As for used-book stores, the renting of hardbacks and series romances not yet available for retail caused much consternation among our survey takers. Several stated that they felt this was a widespread problem which is costing many series romance authors and hardback novelists not only higher royalty payments but maybe even slots on regional and national bestseller lists. **NINK**

**Deborah Camp** would like to thank the survey takers for their time and generosity. Those participating in the 1995 surveys lived in or near Overland Park, KS; San Diego, CA; Denver, CO; Colorado Springs, CO; Pueblo, CO; Indianapolis, IN; Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Lancaster, PA; Detroit, MI and Tulsa, OK.

**Ed. Note:** NINC owes Debby and the Advocacy Committee a debt of gratitude for a job well done.

---

## 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

Carolyn Hanlon (Carolyn Andrews), Fayetteville NY

Jodi Raynor (Jodi O'Donnell), Waxahachie TX

Patricia Rowe, Monroe OR

Chassie L. West (Joyce McGill, Tracy West), Columbia MD

### New Members

Christy Cohen, Boise ID

Annette Mahon, Paradise Valley AZ

---



# Discovering our Roots

by

Rosanne Bittner

**F**or all writers there is that one great, burning passion that forces us to sit down and begin writing. In the beginning it is a fire that can hardly be quenched, so full of dreams and ideas we are, so sure the first book we write will be the greatest story ever written, an instant million-seller, although it isn't numbers and money a beginning writer dreams about. He or she simply has a story inside the heart that must be written and shared with the multitudes.

Those first characters are so real, so alive, they almost consume our daily life, our every thought. We can be doing wash, cooking, working at some other profession, visiting, driving, caring for children, mowing the lawn...and they are there...those characters...telling us what must happen next, begging us not to forget them, forcing us to finish their story. Because of those characters we go through the hell of rejections, tears and rewrites, determined to sell our story, for until we share them with others, they stir restlessly in our souls, disturbing our sleep, causing us to sometimes neglect daily chores, even our family.

Such was my passion for the first books I ever had published, my *Savage Destiny* series. That first story was 40 books ago. It is inevitable that as we have more and more books published and become snared in the "business" end of writing, some of that original passion becomes diluted. We are hit with the hard facts of numbers and advertising budgets, royalty statements and bookshelves that are swamped with hundreds of new titles every month, so that it seems our own "magnificent" stories become buried under a sea of new covers.

It becomes difficult to judge just how far we have come, and if we are not careful, if we allow ourselves to become bogged down with facts and figures, with comparing ourselves to other writers; if we mistakenly allow ourselves to look at our writing as just a business, as though we are working on a production line, it becomes easy to forget just what it was that got us started...that burning desire to write, to be willing to practically give our stories away just to get them published—not to become famous, but because those characters just kept nagging us to be set free.

Sometimes that "business" end of writing, and the deadlines we set for ourselves, can bring us to "burn-out." I said "burn-out," not "writer's block." There is a definite difference. It is a problem probably only those who have had numerous books published would understand. It is the reason we have to turn down requests to speak, to critique manuscripts, to volunteer time. And it is the reason we sometimes sit down in front of the computer and wonder why we're doing all this, wonder if we're going to keep coming up with new ideas, wonder where we will

get the energy to start yet another book, let alone finish it. That all-consuming passion gets lost somewhere along the

way, and we reach the danger point of almost dreading to start another book.

I have discovered that there comes a time when we have to slow down and take a look at things. I have discovered the world does not come to an end if we write two books a year instead of four. I have discovered that taking time for myself, taking longer breaks between books in order to let my body and mind "renew" themselves, only makes the writing better, as well as reviving the enthusiasm to write.

Lo and behold, it isn't a "sin" to write fewer books a year, and it really doesn't make that much difference financially. If pumping them out too fast is going to stunt our growth as a writer, then we must slow down and think about what we can do to *improve* on what we are already doing. And any writer who thinks he or she is already perfect is going to fizzle out some day.

This article is meant to give relief to prolific writers who worry they can't keep up the pace, physically and mentally. It is meant to tell *all* writers that the minute you feel the enthusiasm waning, the minute you feel overwhelmed with schedules and traveling and autographing and deadlines, that is when you must stop and take a look at things, take a break, ask for an extension, study your writing, listen to editors and agents who are trying to tell you how you can improve. You might earn a little less this year, but two years from now the profits might be better than ever, just because *you* are getting better than ever.

My biggest piece of advice to writers who are feeling burned out is to go back and re-read some of those first books you had published. That is what opened my memory to the utter passion with which I started writing.

To launch the reprint of my *Savage Destiny* series, Zebra wanted me to write a seventh book to the series (*Eagle's Song*, coming in June). Because the first book was published 13 years ago, I had to go back and read the entire series before I could write the seventh book.

That seventh book was the easiest story I've ever written, because all I had to do was walk right back into the lives of the family I had left behind with that sixth book in 1986. I had to smile at all the mistakes I made in those early books, but reading them brought back all the same intense emotion with which I wrote the books and that original enthusiasm for writing.

I will remember that passion for writing and keep it close to my heart. When I feel it fading, I will slow down, take time to reflect, to read, to remember, to study what I am writing and what others are writing. I will take more time to write the best story I can write and not be in a hurry. We hurry through too many things today, but writing is one thing that cannot be rushed, not if you want to

# Discovering Our Roots

(Continued from page 9)

do it right, and not if you want to keep the passion alive. Any time you feel overwhelmed by everything; anytime you feel your enthusiasm fading and almost dread starting another book, then don't start it! The world won't end. Stop, and allow yourself to get back to the "roots" of your writing.

Read some of your first books. Think about the reason you wanted to write in the first place. I'll bet it wasn't for fame and money. It was because you had a story to tell, and it meant everything to you to have other people read it. It was because the characters were so real you could feel them sitting beside you. If you can keep that kind of enthusiasm, as well as slow down and improve on every book, there is no end in sight for your writing career.

I wouldn't mind hearing from other multi-published authors on this subject. One great thing about NINC is the ability to share problems and ideas with other authors who fully understand what we're talking about. I seldom read an article in *NINK* without saying to myself, "Yup, I know exactly how she/he feels, what she/he is going through." Thanks to NINC for giving us a way to vent our feelings and ideas to fellow writers.

I am now on the Internet—World Wide Web. You can contact me at my home page at <http://www.parrett.net/~bittner>. Or by e-mail, [bittner@parrett.net](mailto:bittner@parrett.net) *NINK*

**Rosanne Bittner's** seventh *Savage Destiny* book, *Eagle's Song (Zebra, June 1996)* is her 40th western historical novel. Book #1 of the *Savage Destiny* series, *Sweet Prairie Passion*, will also be out in June. #2 through #6 will be published one book per month from July through November, all with new covers.



## It Takes a Team to Build a Conference...

The program for the conference continues to take shape. The final brochure will go out to members in July—so be watching for it! We're putting the finishing touches on the program, nailing down outside speakers, confirming additional editors and agents, and doing our best to give you the kind of conference you want from this organization.

Believe me, I'm not doing this on my own. I wouldn't and couldn't. Without Kate Dooley, NINC's conference planner, I never would have taken this job. She's terrific. She's handling everything from travel arrangements for speakers to how many chairs can fit into a given room. Catherine Coulter has again proved herself a woman of high energy and great generosity with her willingness to make phone calls, brainstorm and help keep me on track. Binnie Syril Braunstein not only keeps my excitement up for Baltimore itself—her love for the area permeates all our conversations—but is working hard behind the scenes. She's putting together sort of a "writer's guide" to local sites and favorite dining spots, including where to have high tea (okay, so I asked).

Others are helping shape discussions on topics where I have limited expertise: Laura Resnick has provided information on what's of special concern—now, in today's market—to science fiction and fantasy writers. Loree Lough is gathering information on opportunities in the growing and wide-open "inspirational" popular fiction market for a special night-owl session. Janice Young Brooks is helping focus our mystery and suspense discussions.

Then there's Julie Kistler, who, I'm convinced, can get the phone number for anyone, anywhere, and Susan Elizabeth Phillips, who's been generous whenever I've needed a pair of "fresh eyes."

I also want to thank those of you who have called, e-mailed or written with your ideas. I've taken note of every

one of them and have incorporated virtually all of them into the tentative program.

By the way, if any of you know of someone who's not a member of Novelists, Inc., but is interested in coming to Baltimore, please let me or anyone on the Board know and we'll get membership info out to them. They can also e-mail NINC at [ninc1989@aol.com](mailto:ninc1989@aol.com).

I'm also delighted to report additional editor and agent confirmations:

- Carolyn Nichols, VP & Publishing Director, Ballantine Publishing
- William Malloy, Editor-in-Chief, Mysterious Press
- Tara Gavin, Silhouette Books
- Eileen Fallon, The Fallon Agency

Back on the day of the Blizzard of the Century, when Victoria Thompson persuaded me to serve as coordinator, I wasn't at all sure about this conference...except that I knew I'd be there because it's one conference I truly hate to miss. Since then, I've gotten excited about the possibilities of our weekend in Baltimore. I continue to hear great things about the hotel (yes!!) and its location, about Baltimore, about October in Maryland. We've got an impressive mix of agents and editors, the program's looking good and we're *this* close to having all our outside speakers confirmed...but that's the subject of next month's report.

Until then, keep the ideas coming, and let me know if you have any questions or concerns or just want to find out what's going on behind the scenes.

October 17-20

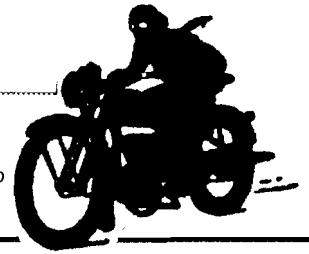
1996 NINC National Annual Conference  
The Radisson Plaza Lord Baltimore Hotel  
800-333-3333 / 410-539-8400

— Carla Neggers

2 Hillcrest Road, Springfield VT 05156  
802-885-3006 or [CNeggers@aol.com](mailto:CNeggers@aol.com)

**Dispatches from the Front** is a "war stories"-type feature. If something funny, black comedy to slapstick, happens to you, send it in. Anonymity will be preserved, of course, if you desire it.

---



## Top Ten Things No One Should Say to Me Again

by

LAURA RESNICK

After I sold my first romance novel, my dad, a longtime science fiction writer, warned me that now that I was a writer—a professional, a novelist—everywhere I went I would constantly encounter people who would ask me to: (1) read their manuscripts for them; (2) write their life stories for them and split the proceeds; (3) write their novel ideas for them and split the proceeds or (4) teach them the Secret Handshake, the key to becoming a published (and extravagantly wealthy and internationally famous) writer—the jealously guarded Secret which, of course, has nothing whatsoever to do with talent, hard work and persistence in the face of rejection.

Much as I hate to write these words...: *Dad was right.* I now seem to meet someone like this almost every time I leave the safety of my home. As a young, innocent, naive writer, I actually tried to deal rationally with such requests and demands. However, I'm not exactly known for my patience, so I eventually developed stock responses designed to thoroughly discourage such petitioners:

- (1) I'm sorry, my lawyer won't let me read your manuscript; take it up with him if you're not satisfied.
- (2) I'll be happy to write your life story. My rate is \$300 per day, five days per week, payable in advance at the beginning of each week, regardless of whether or not you ever find a publisher for this book.
- (3) No, I don't want to write your idea for a novel. It sucks.
- (4) Yes, I could teach you the Secret Handshake...but then I'd have to kill you.

Last year, Barbara Mertz, a *New York Times* bestselling writer in her sixties, and Lawrence Schimel, a very talented new writer in his early twenties, both listed for me the questions they're most sick of being asked. Not only were the lists of these two writers identical despite the vast disparity in their age, experience and success levels, but I (a midlist writer in my early thirties) have the exact same list. So it's not just *me*!

Barbara Mertz, who is one of my all-time favorite authors, writing Egyptology under her own name and fiction under the pseudonyms Barbara Michaels and Elizabeth

Peters, provided my favorite answer to: (5) "Where do you get your ideas?"

Barbara's response: "I order them from a catalogue, or I steal them from my friends." Meanwhile, young Lawrence Schimel told me he can't understand why people always ask, (6) "Have I read anything you've written?" as if he should know what they've read.

Mike Resnick (my dad) hates it when people ask, (7) "And what name do you write under?" as if they've heard of every writer in the world *except* him.

In his guest of honor speech at the 1995 World Science Fiction Convention, Samuel R. Delaney said that upon learning that he's a science fiction writer, people frequently say, (8) "Oh, I don't read that stuff," as if (a) he had asked them, (b) he cared and (c) he should now be impressed by their honesty.

I ask you, when was the last time you met a doctor at a party and automatically said, "Oh, I never have surgery"?

However, the disrespect that Delaney encounters now and then is *nothing* compared to what a blonde romance writer endures. Before I started writing nonfiction and sf/f, when I used to simply say, "I write romance novels," I couldn't even begin to keep track of the number of people who, with apparently no awareness of their own rudeness, would immediately say, (9) "Oh, you write those really trashy books?"

I ask you, when was the last time you met a doctor at a party and said, "Oh, so you're a money-grubbing quack with a God complex"?

I'll tell you when: You did it the last time you automatically asked that total stranger, (10) "Really? And how much money do you make doing that?" **NINK**

**Laura Resnick** is currently at work on her fourteenth novel, all ideas for which were purchased at a Mafia-run idea shop on the corner of Fifth and Vine. What she makes for her books is none of your damn business—though it's not nearly what she deserves.



# 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 or online: [cdouglas@catwriter.com](mailto:cdouglas@catwriter.com). 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	April 7	April 14	April 21	April 28
Leanne Banks	<i>Expectant Father</i>		109n		
Mary Balogh	<i>Truly</i>		169n	114	
Jo Beverly, Rebecca Brandewyne, Debby Macomber	<i>A Spring Bouquet</i>			104n	68
Annette Broadrick et al.	<i>Wanted: Mother</i>				133n
Sandra Brown	<i>A Secret Splendor</i>	105n	29	27	27
Shirlee Busbee	<i>Lovers Forever</i>	119n	47	69	113
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Cove</i>	39	51	68	72
Jennifer Greene	<i>The Unwilling Bride</i>				107n
Tami Hoag	<i>Guilty as Sin</i>	99	112	119	
Shirl Henke	<i>Bride of Fortune</i>	141n			
Linda Howard	<i>Midnight Rainbow</i>		57	82	
Iris Johansen	<i>The Ugly Duckling</i>	163n	126		
Joan Johnston	<i>Captive</i>		91n	54	84
Betina Krahn	<i>The Unlikely Angel</i>	50n	31	53	91
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Autumn Lover</i>	71	136		
Anne McCaffrey	<i>Power Play</i>		110n		
Amanda Quick	<i>Mystique</i>	120	149		
Nora Roberts	<i>Montana Sky</i>	78	90	105	130
Nora Roberts	<i>True Betrayals</i>	28n	14	16	22
Elizabeth Thornton	<i>Dangerous to Hold</i>		121n		
Gina Wilkins, Penny Jordan, Carole Mortimer	<i>Matched by Mistake</i>		147n		

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

## Warning!

(The author of this column just finished a manuscript, bundled it up in a Fed-Ex box and shipped it off to that place called East of the Hudson. He is mentally exhausted and suffering from a malady similar to Post-Partum Blues. Read on only at your own risk.)

## A Living and a Killing

"You can't make a living on Broadway any more, only a killing."

That comment, attributed to playwright William Gibson, smacked me in the consciousness when I read it the other day. There has been an ongoing dialogue, here in *NINK* and elsewhere, about the shrinking middle of our business. Gibson's words suggested that we aren't the only ones who are worried.

Regular readers of the *Old Gray Lady*, also known as the *New York Times*, know that Broadway has been undergoing structural changes. Once a hotbed of new, experimental and just plain off-the-wall drama, only eight new plays opened on Broadway this year.

Instead of opening (and closing) dozens of productions each season, commercial theater in the Big Apple has increasingly focused on what one writer calls "musical spectacles featuring falling chandeliers and whirring helicopters."

These shows play well to what New Yorkers politely call "out-of-town visitors," that perpetually self-renewing pool of tourists and the intellectually unannointed who want extravaganzas, not existential navel-gazing. But such epic crowd-pleasers, running for years, don't pay the bills for dozens of struggling playwrights and hundreds of semi-starving actors.

Sound familiar? Sound a little like the middle of the list has collapsed on Broadway, too?

Things are not easy in The Business right now, whatever "Business" we are talking about. In popular fiction, there is a big gap in the middle, as publishers concentrate on a few best-sellers at the top and some category books at the bottom. If you are a best-seller, you can cut fantastic deals; if you are not, you may suddenly be unable to find a publisher, even if you've been writing and selling books for years.

That's not a Happy Meal we are being served, but it's the only restaurant in town. If we are going to survive, financially and emotionally, we need to be fairly cold-blooded about some things. Publishing is one of them.

## Mass-Market Mess

A few keys to understanding the sad state of the business came in a sobering recent analysis from *Publishers Weekly*. Jim Milliot and John F. Baker reported that dollar

sales of mass-market paperbacks were down 3.3% in 1995 over 1994.

But wait! The news gets worse, so far as writers are concerned. The actual unit sales of mass-market books declined by 6.2%, and the numbers of titles being published shrank even more drastically. Ballantine, for one example, has cut its mass-market list from 80 titles a month to 20 titles a month over the past five years.

We all knew things were bad, but the *PW* piece offered some explanations that I hadn't thought about.

First, there is a sharp consolidation going on among independent distributors. Since last September, when it began, the number of distributors has been cut nearly in half, from 180 to 100. The best guess is that the consolidation will continue, with perhaps 50 or 60 ultimate survivors.

The shakeout among IDs is far more bloody than the one that has hit the independent bookstore sector, and it probably means more for authors of popular fiction. IDs stock the racks of supermarkets, drugstores, airports and smoke stands. They sell a hell of a lot of our books.

What the trend will mean for mass-market authors is still not entirely clear, but some things are evident. Purchasing decisions will be in fewer and fewer hands. Best-seller racks will look more and more alike across the country.

The survivors of the bloodbath will be operating on thinner margins. They will be expecting 60 or 70% sell-throughs. Middle-range authors, who could survive on 50% sell-throughs or less in the past, will suddenly become risky buys, first for the distributors and then, ultimately, for the publishers.

Not a comforting thought. Sorry. Happy Meals are in short supply.

*PW* found another reason for the mass-market mess, too, this one in the aisles of the superstores. Now, I admit a certain fondness for superstores. They are more democratic than many of the independent booksellers I know. But superstores turn out not to be a great venue for mass-market paperbacks.

Superstores love hardbacks, which are vastly profitable, even when deeply discounted. They like trade paperbacks for the same reason.

Mass-market books are a different matter. Readers can find mass-market best-sellers at the supermarket or the drug store. Barnes & Noble and the other big stores don't like that kind of competition.

In truth, superstores don't seem to recognize the distinction between "fiction" and mass-market fiction, and that may be part of the problem. They maintain limited sections for individual genres and a large, undifferentiated "fiction" section where Grisham's thrillers get shelved next to Guterson's literary fiction.





## EAST OF THE HUDSON

Both books are "fiction," but they don't necessarily play to the same audience. Superstores will have to address that fact in the future, or lose out completely to the IDs and however many independent bookstores there are who survive.

Finally, *PW* pointed out that the price increases in mass-market books, and the deep discounting of hardbacks and trade paper editions, has had the effect of blurring old market distinctions. The gulf between a hardback and a mass-market book is not as great as it used to be, and, surprisingly, the mass-market end of the business seems to have suffered.

The distinction between hardback and paperback has become a marketing distinction, not a literary one. When a \$20 hardback bestseller is deeply discounted at a warehouse club, it suddenly goes into price-point competition with trade paperbacks and even with full price mass-market books.

That is not necessarily bad news for writers of popular fiction. So-called "genre" writers are finding outlets in hardback first, then in paperback. That means the earning power for a single story goes up, for some of us.

But it may also mean that writers who aren't perceived as best-seller material may find themselves squeezed out of the marketplace.

Despite all the gloom, publishers say they are not going to give up on the mass-market format. It's still a \$1.3 billion business, after all. But mass-market fiction is changing and we need to pay attention to the change or we'll be eaten alive by it.

### Fabio? Who He?

Our colleague Suzanne Simmons Guntrum passed on a clipping that did my malicious heart good.

It seems that coverboy Fabio's "I Can't Believe It's Not Butter" television spots were the most disliked ads among the 40 campaigns measured by a recent *USA Today* survey.

Almost 40% of respondents said they disliked the spots. That's a very high negative rating for an ad campaign that costs \$10 million to put together and air.

On the other hand, the advertiser claimed to be pleased with the campaign, which helped to make the butter substitute the #2 brand in the \$1.2 billion-a-year margarine business.

*USA Today* pointed out that there is no relationship between likeability of an ad and sales of a product, so maybe Fabio isn't dead as a product spokesman. Who knows, maybe he could use his high negatives in support of Bill Clinton?

Or Bob Dole for that matter?

(Would it be tacky of me to say that he's the perfect salesman for a butter substitute, since he always struck me

as just a little bit oleaginous.

(And, no, that's not an Italian joke.)

### New Trend in Publishing

If the sales of your mystery or romance or western aren't as strong as you had hoped, you might try something new. Emulate the success of Jostein Gaarder and write a young-adult novel combining a mystery with an introductory course on the history of philosophy.

Then, sell it to adult reading groups.

Gaarder, the Norwegian author of *Sophie's World*, wrote it for young adults. In a series of letters from a mysterious philosopher, 14-year-old Sophie learns how famous thinkers dealt with the basic questions of existence.

But in this country, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, one of our more serious *literary* houses, has pitched the book to a much older, ostensibly more serious audience: reader clubs like the one that meets once a week in the back room of our local independent bookstore.

Now, in paperback, the book is a genuine national bestseller, *New York Times* and all.

I find it hard to believe that there are that many bored folks and small-town bohemian wannabes. but the evidence is hard to ignore.

The whole thing puts me in mind of what another writers said to me recently. "People with light lives want something labeled heavy reading. People with heavy lives want light reading, no labels required."

(No, I won't tell you who she was but I will tell you she said it to me in bed.)

### An Apology

Rereading the top of this column, I realize now that I was unusually dyspeptic, even for me.

Chalk it up to exhaustion. In the past four weeks, two new manuscripts, one set of galleys and a copy-edited manuscript have been shipped from this little house in the big woods.

In other words, I've been stressed.

Which puts me in mind of the following warning about work, submitted by Jan (Justine Davis/Justine Dare) Smith. Jan found it in a writer's magazine. While I have never met its author, Michael Ventura, I admire his wisdom.

Ventura was musing about The Room, the place where we all do our work.

"The room can become a hole. Your talent in the room, your ability to be there with all your soul, can overwhelm you. Then the rest of the world becomes unreal and, worse than unreal, a kind of unlife.

"So you find yourself writing with a very sophisticated consciousness but living in your relationships with other people far beneath what you write, because it's gotten so you can only really exist in that room and you don't care



## EAST OF THE HUDSON

about outside.

"And since you write necessarily from memory—for writing is memory, is what you cared

about yesterday, or last month, or in your childhood—your lack of feeling for the present may not show up in your work for a while. But when it does, you're through. You may still be published, still make money, still be read, but people won't care the way they used to—and they'll know it and they'll let you know it."

That's sobering, too, perhaps as sobering as all the stuff about mass-market messes.

We all have one thing in common. We are storytellers. We love to gather folks around us and spin yarns.

Without our stories, we would be just plain, average people.

But story-telling is like acting or brain surgery; it takes energy.

So, I want you all to go take a walk in the woods. Listen to the birds, smell the flowers, find some member of an appealing gender and jump him or her. Stories celebrate life. You need strength, even to celebrate.

As for me, the First Mate (oh, boy, am I going to pay for that) and I are going to get on the boat and head north, up past Desolation Sound. We're going to find a nice quiet bay, some place where the salmon are biting and the mosquitoes are not.

I promise I'll be more cheerful when we get back.

— **Evan Maxwell**

---

## Prostitutes and Pimps

*(The following appeared recently on Ninlink, NINC's maillist, in response to a general comment about the similarities between writers and prostitutes.)*

Now that you mention it, there *do* seem to be a lot of similarities between prostitutes and writers.

One thing I'm wondering is what prostitutes say to starry-eyed aspiring prostitutes who want to go into the world's oldest profession. They probably don't want to burst their bubbles, but they probably don't want to give them unrealistic expectations, either.

I'll bet they say things like this:

"It's not as glamorous as you think. 'Pretty Woman' ('Romancing the Stone') was just a movie. It isn't really like that."

"There's no such thing as security in this business. One day you're doing okay. The next day, your best customer dumps you for no good reason and you're living in a cardboard box."

"It's true that *some* people make a *lot* of money at it, and have fancy condos in L.A. and drive Cadillacs and sell their stuff to Hollywood and all, but most of us are lucky if we can manage a hand-to-mouth existence. The competition is brutal."

"I know it doesn't *seem* like it would be physically demanding, but it really wears you out. The burn-out rate would shock you."

"Almost everyone I know in this business has been in therapy at one time or another. You have to have a strong sense of identity to survive in this line of work."

"Pimps are the *worst*. But, hey, if you want the really high-paying jobs, you've got to have one."

"Listen, honey. You seem like a bright girl/boy. Do

By  
**Kathy Chwedyk**

yourself a favor. Go to night school. Learn a trade. This is no way for a sane person to make a living."

"Once you go professional, the word gets out and people start expecting you to give it away for free."

"People are always badgering you for the secret to your success. Next thing you know, they're making themselves cozy on your favorite corner and trying to compete with you."

"**One** thing you've got to learn, sweetheart, is if you want to be a professional, you have to go where the work is. The customers want leather and spurs and whips (or angels or cowboys or babies or brides or pirates), you've got to be flexible. Remember, the customer is always right, even if his/her tastes are a little kinky. If you don't have a strong stomach and a lot of determination, this isn't the job for you." **NINK**

**Kathy Chwedyk** (a.k.a. Cathryn Huntington Chadwick) has written two Regencies for Zebra and a short story collaboration with Laura Resnick titled "Qadishtu," which appears in the recently released anthology *Warrior Enchantresses*, edited by Kathleen M. Massie-Ferch and Martin R. Greenberg for DAW.

Information for joining the Ninlink maillist is in the editor's note on the back cover.

### Coming Soon:

Navigating the Book Buy-Back Route • Laptop Shopping Guide • The Lure of Media Tie-Ins • Conference Updates • East of the Hudson

# Wal-Mart, Zebra Launch \$1.78 Romances

**I**n May, Zebra Books and Wal-Mart launched their Precious Gem publishing venture—a four-month trial of selling eight romances a month exclusively through Wal-Mart at a cover price of \$1.78. According to a combined press release from Wal-Mart and Zebra, “Wal-Mart is the nation’s leading marketer of romance novels.”

Zebra, a division of Kensington Publishing Corporation, has confirmed that authors of the 160-page books have been offered a flat-fee, no-royalty deal that includes a 75,000 print run sold on a non-returnable basis to Wal-Mart. The amount of the fee may vary, but a representative of the publisher did confirm that \$500 was a commonly paid amount. Contracts also vary regarding reversion rights and foreign rights, according to Barbara Bennett, general counsel for Kensington. Kate Duffy is the editor in charge of the program.

Kensington Vice President and Publisher Lynn Brown said in the combined press release that “We think this is both a great way to offer even more value to price-conscious Wal-Mart shoppers and to provide them with access to wonderful writers who are sometimes being forced off the shelves because space for books in stores is at such a premium.” Many of the books are from the unpublished inventory of Meteor Publishing Corporation, which ceased operation in 1993 and returned the manuscripts to its former authors.

Duffy, the former editor-in-chief at Meteor, said the first 16 books in the program are all contemporaries. Historical romances will be part of the second half of the four-month trial. Duffy said she was in the process of writing guidelines for the program, which features books of approximately 40,000 words. Some manuscripts have run as high as 55,000, however, she added.

She emphasized that rack space for the Precious Gem series will not come from shelves currently occupied by series romance from other publishers because Wal-Mart is constructing a separate floor display. According to the combined press release, the line will be promoted through banners hanging from shelves, displays in the book section and colorful signs announcing the program. Cover art has been contracted from Pino and Franco.

When *NINK* asked Duffy if this program could change the face of series romance publishing, she replied that she “didn’t see Harlequin changing the way they do business because of Kensington’s deal with Wal-Mart.”

“I think we’re going to recruit new readers,” she added.

Wal-Mart spokesman Keith Morris echoed that statement in the combined press release. “The Precious Gem program offers us a chance to reach an even wider audience for romance novels by making them more accessible to our customers who look for high quality products at low cost,” he said.

Duffy emphasized the trial basis of the publishing program and said that Kensington will reevaluate the project at the end of that trial period, which concludes in August.

*NINK*

**Ed. note:** The genesis of this article was a discussion on *NINC*’s maillist, *ninlink*. Interest was so intense that an article seemed necessary. If you have an e-mail address and would like to subscribe, simply address an e-mail to: [ninlink-d-request@cue.com](mailto:ninlink-d-request@cue.com) and then write the word *subscribe* in the message box. To post messages, send them to [ninlink@cue.com](mailto:ninlink@cue.com)

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