

Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 7, Number 8

August 1996

Thirds Split Should Be Challenged

By ETHAN ELLENBERG

I remember reading about Viacom's acquisition of Paramount and thinking it would also have little effect on Simon & Schuster and Pocket Books. I also remember reading about how the New-houses (the family that own Random House) weren't completely satisfied with how Random House was performing and that their magazine properties weren't living up to their potential, another story that seemed to spell opportunity rather than trouble to me.

How wrong I was. Over lunch with an editor from S&S/Pocket books and in a recent contract negotiation with Random House, I've learned of a new corporate policy at both houses—thirds. No matter how small the advance, no matter what the precedent was before, these two enormous publishing conglomerates would no longer be paying any advances in the traditional halves, on signing an agreement and on acceptance

(continued on page 5)

Survival Skills 101:

The Muse vs. the Mortgage Payment

When writing is what you do for a living, how do you hang on, hang in and stay commercial? A few of our members posed this question, so NINK looked for answers. Among those polled were writers of fantasy, historicals, horror, mystery, romance, science fiction, westerns and books for young adults.

It begins as a labor of love. Or catharsis. It has been described as a compulsion. An obsession.

It was fun. It was necessary. And you did it just for yourself.

Then, it became your job.

Remember how it was, back in the beginning? How little outside pressure there was when you first started to write? The only demands and expectations were your own, and you weren't burdened with the mood swings of the business itself. That wasn't surprising, considering how few of us knew anything about the business of publishing. We were educators, accountants, social workers and entrepreneurs.

Nurses, Realtors, homemakers and secretaries; brilliant people, obviously, but blissfully naive when it came to the publishing process.

We'd never heard of cover

proofs or sell-throughs, retention or reversion. It never occurred to us that a print run would be clas-

sified information, or that nearly everyone in the industry can access sales figures other than the person who writes the manuscript. One veteran author thought publishers advertised all writers' books and arranged autographings and interviews. Another was amazed by how badly the majority of writers were treated, considering who produces the product the publishers sell.

Still another admits she never thought of books as products before. But she's since come to learn that's what they are. That's how publishers and book distributors see them, and, in the categories, especially, they are regarded primarily as interchangeable parts of a marketing package or display rack. They've been described as everything from boxes of toothpaste to cans of soup, and while the analogies insult our efforts, the sharks in the publishing food chain will never see them as anything else.

"I didn't realize how much of a business it was," *(continued on page 7)*

In This Issue

President's Column	2
Letters to the Editor	3
Point / Counterpoint	6
Laptop of Luxury	9
NINC Notes	11
Fast Track	12
East of the Hudson	13
Baltimore Conference Update	15
Online	16

Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

Advisory Council

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

Who's a Member and Who Isn't?

Recently, we've had some questions from members about whether or not we have associate members in Novelists, Inc., so we wanted to clear that issue right up. As you probably know, in order to qualify for membership in NINC, you must

have published at least two novels of popular fiction and at least one of them must have been published within the past five years. These qualifications make NINC an organization of multi-published authors who are far enough along in their careers that they know the ropes and who are still actively publishing, i.e. true working writers. Occasionally, someone who is working as an editor or an agent also qualifies for full membership in NINC by virtue of having published two or more novels. But what about associate members?

In our early days, our newsletter was confidential to members only, but when we removed the confidentiality rule, we also began to sell subscriptions to *Novelists' Ink* to people who otherwise did not qualify for NINC membership. Subscriptions are available to editors and agents as well as to unpublished authors, published authors who are not yet qualified for membership, and any other industry professional who might be interested.

Although we haven't sold many subscriptions to *NINK*, there has been some confusion among those who have the subscriptions because they sometimes refer to themselves as associate members. This is simply a misunderstanding on their part. NINC has only one category of membership. Authors who meet the qualifications for NINC membership are full members and receive all the benefits of that membership. Individuals who do not meet those qualifications are merely subscribers to *NINK*. I hope that clears up any misunderstanding.

Five Years without a Sale and You're Out of NINC?

Which brings me to another question. Every now and then we hear from a member who is panicked because five years have elapsed since his/her last published book, and this member is afraid s/he is no longer eligible to belong to NINC.

This is a question the founding board addressed, and they decided that since it is virtually impossible to police the entire membership, we would make the "five year" rule a qualification for *obtaining* membership but not for *maintaining* it. In other words, once you're in, you're in.

Presumably, a writer who is no longer actively pursuing publication would have no reason to maintain NINC membership and would drop out. On the other hand, writers frequently hit "dry spells" in their careers that

This Month from the President:

- *SINCE WHEN DO WE HAVE ASSOCIATE MEMBERS? Who qualifies for membership and who doesn't?*
- *FIVE YEARS AND YOU'RE OUT! I haven't sold a book in five years—does that mean I'm out of NINC?*
- *NOT ANOTHER BYLAW CHANGE! Yes, but this one is really interesting.*
- *DID YOU GET YOUR CONFERENCE BROCHURE?*

***... "five year" rule a qualification for obtaining membership
but not for maintaining it...once you're in, you're in.***

may last five years or even longer. We believe that a writer who is still actively writing should be allowed to maintain NINC membership, even if s/he hasn't published in awhile. Who, after all, needs us more? Hope that puts some minds at ease.

Can't They Get those Bylaws Right?

Yes, it looks as if we're going to be presenting another bylaw amendment this year for you to consider. This one would create the office of President-Elect, a position that would replace our current Vice President on the board. The person elected to this position would serve one year as President-Elect and then would automatically become President the following year.

Our immediate past president Bill Bernhardt suggested creating this position last year, and after lengthy discussions, the various other past presidents and other members of the Advisory Council have all recommended that we take this step. While it will make the presidency a two-year commitment, it will also enable the person

who accepts the position to spend a year on the board, learning all the inner workings of the organization, before having to take over as president. The advantages of this are obvious. Since most of our past presidents have not had previous experience on the NINC board, they had to spend valuable time learning the job instead of being able to assume leadership immediately. This seems the most logical way to ensure that *all* our future presidents are experienced the moment they take office, and both the Board and the Advisory Council are strongly recommending passage of this amendment.

Baltimore Conference

By now you should have received your conference brochure. If you haven't, please see the Conference Report on page 15 for instructions on obtaining one. We don't want anyone to miss out on the wonderful opportunities we are providing in Baltimore!

— **Victoria Thompson**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Precious Gems Author Responds

In the past few months, I've sold three books to Zebra for the Wal-Mart Precious Gem series. As most people know and have complained about loudly, the initial flat-

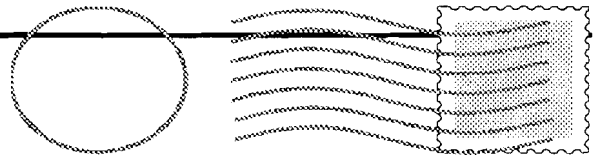
fee payment was \$500 regardless of whether or not the author was published. The only negotiable aspect of the deal was whether to retain foreign rights or let Zebra market them.

I've heard and read a lot of negative comments about the sale, so I decided to explain my reasons for accepting Zebra's terms.

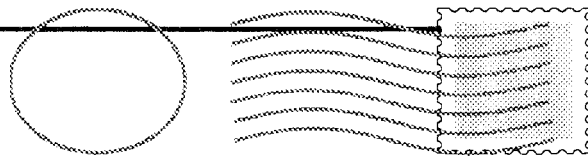
In the beginning, the arrangement was experimental, so there were no guarantees of future sales. On the other hand, there was an opportunity that a new short contemporary market might become available to writers facing an ever-tightening market.

While the \$500 was an insult to my bank account and my ego, the books are earning something. There are a lot of writers willing to finance their own publishing, so this wasn't much different.

For me, however, there were several reasons other than financial that made the sales a sound business decision. The main reason was that I had a lot of faith →



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



(Continued from page 3)

in the stories, yet they'd been rejected by every publisher currently buying short contemporaries. I accepted the contract rather than burying the manuscripts in a closet and writing off the time and energy already invested in them.

Two of those stories had been under contract with Me-teor and had earned over \$13,000 in advances, but I'm not suggesting that those earnings in any way justify Zebra's offering such a small amount for the rights. That was one of the deciding factors for all those I've spoken to, but the main reason is a simple desire to see their books in print.

Some of the positive aspects for me include having books out this year, so that there won't be such a long time between my releases. Also, I'll have my name on more than 200,000 books, and there's no way I can put a price tag on that amount of promotion. I'm certain I couldn't afford the distribution even if I could supply the promotional material.

Another factor was working with Kate Duffy. She knows my work and had already edited one of the books. I had no revisions to do and didn't have to devote any time beyond the reading of proof pages.

I sincerely believe that accepting flat fees, ghost writing, writing for packagers and work-for-hire are all legitimate, necessary means of survival in this business. For those of us who don't have guaranteed slots on our publishers' lists, any additional opportunities and income are welcomed.

Now that the experimental portion of the Wal-Mart deal is over and the line has been extended for an additional eight months, Zebra is offering published authors \$3,000 and unpubs, \$2,000; still on a flat-fee basis. The contracts are very simple and don't include option or pseudonym clauses.

Authors receive 75 free copies of their books. I've already seen my July release, and I'm really pleased with the cover. There's a lot of story crammed into 156 pages, so the only problem I see is the small print. A manuscript targeted especially for the line shouldn't have that problem.

The print run is down from 75,000 to 60,000 with a no-return policy. The cover price is \$1.78, so future books will be earning more than the average romance does at the book club rate. Not many authors are satisfied with 2% royalties, yet that's what the flat fee will amount to. I'd much prefer a couple million, but nobody's offering it.

As far as shelf space goes, any new line, reprints, or new titles will affect the spacing. The Precious Gems may seem more attractive to someone on a limited budget, but I don't think they'll discourage dedicated romance readers from demanding their favorite authors or lines. They

might cut down on the number of used books purchased, but I'm hoping they'll just be that one extra book the readers can afford.

Considering the increasing confusion over electronic rights, the rental of advance copies, resale of used books and book stripping, we might all be looking for improved methods of payment in the near future. I haven't had much experience with the flat-fee concept, but it may become more profitable in the long run.

I'm not online, but anyone with comments is welcome to write me at P.O. Box 113, Mt. Sterling OH 43143. Write or call Zebra for submission information.

— **Becky Barker**

Resale at B&N Spreading

Regarding Barnes & Noble's resale division: The new B&N at Fiesta Plaza here in San Antonio is selling used books. I was there a few weeks ago to buy *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, and when I paid for it, the clerk said, "I think we have a used copy for \$3. That way you won't have to spend \$20 on a new book." I declined his offer. I didn't say anything to him; he was just a kid with no power. But it irks me that these superstores are not only forcing the independents out of the business, now they're selling used.

— **Martha Hix**

Ed. Note: *NINK* would like to collect more information from members on the resale division of Barnes & Noble. If you have a B&N in your area and you discover it sells used books, please let the *NINK* editor know.

Buybacks Astound Her

I'm astounded at the Article "Buying Back a Book" in the July issue of *NINK*. Publishers break contracts and the writers pay back the advance? And even pay back the agent's share? Are these agents getting 15% of the writer's earnings — and if so, what are they doing for it?

— **Daphne Clair de Jong**

Wanted: Bibliographies

I am working on a website that currently contains over 1000 author bibliographies. My aim is to have a comprehensive site where all authors can have their bibliographies without having to jump all over the Net to find them. If any of your members would like to have their bibliographies included on my site, I would greatly appreciate their input.

— **Lucie MacDougall**
rjm-lfm@brunswickmicro.nb.ca
(Ross & Lucie MacDougall)

Challenge Thirds Split

(Continued from page 1)

of the completed manuscript.

This is serious. The editor I had lunch with told me it was a strict policy and that it recently took him two months to negotiate a payment schedule for not a lot of money because of it. He's been told there are no exceptions and that the third payment would usually be on publication. My experience with Random House was similar. I negotiated an advance and, having worked with this editor on this kind of book before, assumed I would receive all the other terms we had worked on in the past. When I got the agreement the payment schedule was divided into thirds, including a publication payment. I was able to negotiate this back to halves, but only after considerable effort and a stern lecture—this is the last time.

This is a disaster for authors. Viacom's desire to pay down ten billion dollars worth of debt and Random's desire to raise its profitability are legitimate business goals. They do not conform to the financial reality of writers and they are not fair in a deeper sense. One piece of background before I make my case: The old rule of thumb for most advances carrying small advances—\$5,000 to \$25,000 or so, was that the publisher would always pay in halves. When the publisher had a publishable book, the author would be paid. For higher amounts, especially at the \$100,000 level, it was understood that there would be a longer payout, often including a publication payment. This "gentleman's agreement" is now dust.

Authors have their own cash flow problems. With the wait for publication never less than one year and often as long as two, this change represents a sizable reduction in an author's yearly income. At advance levels in the \$25,000 and below range I do not believe it is fair for the author to finance a publishing company, which is exactly

what this is doing. It is unfair and a terrible blow for writers who earn their living writing. The fact that the money will eventually arrive doesn't mitigate the damage. You cannot compare a household budget to two multi-billion-dollar companies.

I'm going to fight these new policies. I think Novelists, Inc. should fight these new policies. I'm very concerned that as a group writers are losing the battle to maintain the power balance between themselves and the publishers. In my life as an agent there was the first great disaster and still the biggest one—the erosion of the cover price royalty to "freight pass through" and discount schedules. Then there was the recent battle over electronic rights—also lost by writers as a group. Now, the great cash flow fight has commenced. I think it's time we won one, and this one may be more important to individual writers than any other.

We're headed for a class system in the writing field—the bestsellers on top treated like royalty, and, down below, everyone else, income reduced by new house policies that almost smack of a kind of serfdom. It's not a pretty picture. And these aren't crocodile tears. I like negotiating terms and contracts; I don't object to publishers trying to negotiate the best deal they can. But there has got to be an underlying element of fairness and balance to any negotiation. It cannot be whatever the strong can get away with.

These new corporate policies, unilateral and unnegotiable, are harsh by any measure. Viacom can increase its cash flow a little more slowly and Newhouse Publications (owner of Random House) can increase its profitability a little more slowly. This is one business problem which shouldn't be solved at the expense of publishing's most junior partners—the writers. *NINK*

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:

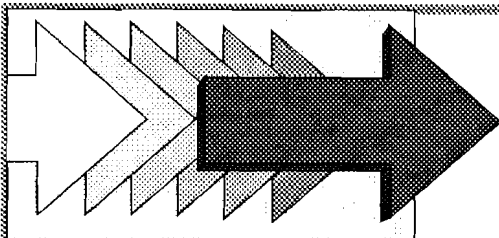
New Applicants

Gordon K. Aalborg (*Victoria Gordon*), Sidney, B.C.
Patti Berg, Rescue CA
Susan Holloway Scott (*Miranda Jarrett*), Paoli PA
Ginny Schweiss (*Jenna McKnight*), Grover MO
Tamar Myers, Rock Hill SC

Marti Robb (*Mariah Stewart*), Lansdowne PA

New Members

Kate Donovan, Sacramento CA
Marcia Evanick, Reinholds PA
Cathy Forsythe, Fort Collins CO
Donna Julian (*Jillian Grey, Jaymi Cristol*), St. Peters MO
Janice Hess (*Janice Carter*), Toronto, Ont.
Harriet Pilger (*Corey McFadden*), McLean VA
Nikoo McGoldrick (*May McGoldrick*), Sellersville PA
Jim McGoldrick (*May McGoldrick*), Sellersville PA
Judith McWilliams (*Charlotte Hines*), Scranton PA
Susan Ann Pace (*Allison Lane*), San Jose CA



POINT / COUNTERPOINT

This column features a particular POINT. Agreement 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.

Hmmm...let's see...bad taste: TV repairman's cleavage, black fishnet hose with a pin stripe suit (gender immaterial), three-month-old cottage cheese, carrying your book at a Novelists, Inc. conference.... Probably I could get 100% agreement on the cottage cheese, but the rest? I doubt it, since taste, good or bad, is a matter of...taste. My copy of Miss Manners doesn't cover the etiquette of carrying your book at a Novelists, Inc. conference, so I guess we're on our own. I don't find it in bad taste, whether as self-promotion—why one would automatically ascribe that motive, I don't know—or as self-introduction. I frankly wish people would carry around their current book or at least a cover flat or jacket because I can't keep up with what we're all doing and who has a new book out. Invariably, I ask more than one person at a NINC conference if they've had anything new out lately, only to find out they do—a book that's a bestseller and/or getting a lot of comment. My ignorance isn't bad taste, but it is embarrassing. How much easier it would be if they had a book tucked under their arm or a flat or jacket in plain sight since I tend to remember book titles much better than author names. A book/cover/jacket would also be a good conversation starter and, since I don't have time to check out cover art as much as I probably should, a great way to keep up with new trends and styles.

Perhaps underneath the bad taste charge is a worry that some conference goers might be upset because they don't have a new book out. I worry about carrying political correctness to such an extreme that we're supposed to hide our work as if we're ashamed of it. Novelists, Inc. members are all adults and all professionals so hopefully able to take someone else's success in stride without succumbing to consuming envy or severe depression.

A couple of conferences back one member was showing around her book or cover flat—I don't remember which. It was a beautiful cover, but it had a small problem—the heroine had three hands, and the book wasn't a fantasy or sci fi. I didn't hear anyone voice a suspicion of self-promotion or self-congratulation, but I did hear plenty of laughter. Are we an organization that will tolerate only the sight of a book we can make fun of? Maybe we should have a rule about the etiquette of *that*.

— **Patty Gardner Evans**

P.S. I asked a friend whose architect husband regularly goes to professional conferences if he ever takes any of his drawings to show. After giving me a disbelieving look, she said of course he did; it was expected.

NINC RITA Winners

Eleven NINC members brought home RITA awards in Romance Writers of America's sixteenth annual conference in Dallas July 11-14. Anne Stuart won the Lifetime Achievement Award and Nora Roberts claimed the Favorite Book of 1995 for *Born in Ice*. Hall of Fame inductees were Eileen Dreyer, Jo Beverly, Cheryl Zach, and Nora Roberts. Honored in specific categories were:

Cheryl Zach, *Runaway*, Berkley, Young Adult

Alison Hart (Jennifer Greene), *Single Dad*, Silhouette, Short Contemporary

Janice Davis Smith (Justine Davis), *The Morning Side of Dawn*, Silhouette Long Contemporary

Anne Stuart Ohlrogge (Anne Stuart), *Winter's Edge*, Harlequin, Romantic Suspense/Gothic

Nora Roberts, *Born in Ice*, Berkley, Contemporary Single Title

Alicia Rasley (co-author Lynn Kerstan), *Gwen's Christmas Ghost*, Kensington, Regency

Loretta Chekani (Loretta Chase), *Lord of Scoundrels*, Avon, Short Historical

Pamela Morsi, *Something Shady*, Berkley, Long Historical

Barbara Samuel, *The Last Chance Ranch*, Janet Dailey Award

Muse vs. Mortgage

(Continued from page 1)

says Vella Munn, who has authored over 30 historical and contemporary romances in the past ten years. "Or how little security a writer has."

We realize it now. Along with a few other things.

Having learned a few of the ropes, one author knows that she let go of an early book far too soon; that, with experience, she would have realized there was more she could have done with it. Another has come to understand "that an agent will sacrifice an author to stay in with a publisher." Another knows that staying with his first publisher as long as he did stalled his career.

"I should have used more pen names."

"I *shouldn't* have used a pen name."

"I wish I'd joined professional organizations sooner."

"I'd have held out for better contracts."

We've also learned that it takes more than talent to survive.

Creativity versus The Market (Or, I'd like to do it my way, but I have to pay the electric bill.)

Publishers are in the business to make money. Impolitic as it may be to admit, and with apologies to those who consider the admission crass, so are writers. (When asked what now motivates them to write, only two of the authors polled said they wrote for love of the craft. The rest didn't hesitate to say it was the green stuff—except for Lawrence Watt-Evans. What motivates him is a desire to avoid a nine-to-five job, but he admitted money was a close second to that one, too.)

There is a strange and disparate attitude in the publishing world about writers and money. On the one hand,

Few of us are writing to indulge some illusive muse.

there is the axiom that he who gets the biggest advance wins. On the other, royalty rates being what they are, it's almost as if

the writer is supposed to be satisfied just to see the work in print. It is satisfying work. As Susan Macias put it, "It's just about the coolest job in the universe." But few of us are writing simply to indulge some illusive muse. Anyone who is, has another means of support.

It's because writing is what we do for a living that we have authors who would love to write paranormals writing traditional romance instead. Or who would like to do horror, but don't because there's more money in fantasy. Mysteries were what initially intrigued another, but what sells for him are westerns. A writer writes. And those who succeed tend to be pragmatic about the business.

After 26 years as an author, Meg Chittenden now "automatically cuts off certain areas of creativity in order to sell. To publish you have to be prepared to do that." She went on to say that, while she's always written what

she wanted to write, she thought that might have been a mistake when she was first getting established. She kept upsetting her readers because she was writing so many different things. The same held for many of us who didn't know "back then," that readers want to know what to expect from an author.

Booksellers insist that a reader who asks for an author by name is wanting a certain type of story. By the time a writer has established a readership, those readers have developed certain ex-

pectations. If you don't fulfill them, you risk losing them. Or, at least, ticking them off.

"I'm afraid to take risks with my writing." Denise Domning

Consider what

happened to R.L. Stine, the publishing phenomenon who captured the hearts (and allowances) of the forgotten reader—the eight to twelve-year-old boy. The one book he wrote without his usual happy ending, morphed into a monster.

Wanting to do something a little different, Stine didn't wrap up one of his *Goosebumps* stories with the bad guy getting his. Or, in this case, hers. He said he thought the different ending was "a nice change of pace." That it was, "ironic and funny."

His readers thought otherwise.

The first letter he received began, "Dear R.L. Stine. You idiot." Another was from a child wanting the rest of the book because he was sure his copy was missing the concluding pages. Because Stine happens to sell around three million books a month, he'll redeem himself with his readers with major publicity around a reader contest for a sequel. The writer a fan or two short of his following won't necessarily get the chance.

"I'm afraid to take risks with my writing," admits Denise Domning. "I'm monetarily motivated and the money keeps getting better with each contract. The question becomes, does a writer follow her creative urges, or make a living?"

"I'd take them," claims another author, speaking of risks. "It's getting my editor to do it."

Her frustration is shared by others. But, to be fair, we know that editors are constrained, too. An idea might sound fantastic to them personally; groundbreaking, inspired, whatever. But how will it play in Peoria? Risk translates to potential loss of profit and if the book bombs, they have to answer for it. Too many publishing "mistakes" and they're on the street, too. As Charley Perlberg, a former university professor with 22 westerns to his credit, points out, editors have to answer to their superiors; to justify what they buy. He sees how constrained editors are in their choices, though he fears that the demand of what readers want isn't being met because of it.

Many authors feel there are too many people →

Muse vs. Mortgage

(Continued from page 7)

between the writer and the reader to get a true take on what the public wants; that readers can only buy what's out there and that they would buy differently if we were allowed to give them something else. But this is just one of the frustrations writers learn to live with, or learn to make work in their favor.

"You have to be creative to meet the requirements of the market, but stay fresh enough that it will stand out," says Cheryl Zach, prolific author of books for young adults. "In a way, the constraints make you creative."

The creative self always has to stay in touch with reality, with what's commercial, what sells. But what about the writer who feels boxed in by the very sort of story s/he once loved? As one author lamented, a couple of her all-time favorite stories have yet to see print because, in her opinion, they're too experimental, too risky. "I warn myself to stay with what's commercial," she says, "but the soul needs to be fed."

Can we be creative and still be commercial?

The Market versus Creativity

Other than having a line fold, a house going under, or having your option dropped, few writers could think of anything more crippling to a career than writing something you no longer like. The reference here isn't to the usual this-is-a-piece-of-donkey-dung-whatever-made-me-think-I-knew-how-to-write-dear-God-they're-going-to-want-the-advance-back kind of anxiety. That's normal stuff. This sort of aversion is the kind that develops when you feel you've gone as far as you can go writing the type of stories you're selling and you resent having to rein yourself in. Or, you don't exactly hate what you're doing, but you need to push the envelope creatively, and your editor won't let

"In a way, the constraints make you creative." Cheryl Zach

you. Or, your editor is willing, but you're afraid to rock your readership boat; yet, you can't stop writing romance/mystery/science fiction be-

cause that's what pays the mortgage. In other words, you can't afford to quit your day job.

Knowing what they know now, the advice several of our authors offered boiled down to this:

Do what you did back in the beginning. Write on spec. You reinvent yourself, if necessary.

"Diversify," says Charley Perlberg.

"Don't be satisfied by having just one publisher," offers Vella Munn. "Keep trying to expand...keep your options as open as possible."

"Use a different name," suggests Lawrence Watt-Evans.

"...It means starting a second career from scratch, but I think it's worth it in the long run. I now use two names, one for fantasy and horror and another for science fiction and action/adventure, and just wish I'd started doing it sooner. It'll mean working hard for a couple of years to get the new name established, but hey, you know how to write a publishable novel now, so you can skip a lot of the beginning-a-career stuff. And if one career crashes and burns...you'll have a back-up in place."

(It was interesting to note that the writers who seemed most content with their careers were those who had recently changed from

one house, or one genre, to another, or who were writing more than one kind of book. The latter group also seemed to possess a better sense of security because their publishing eggs weren't all in the same basket.)

Meg Chittenden suggests giving one hour a day to whatever you'd rather be doing. Or, one day a week. Whatever you can spare.

Susan Macias allows herself two weeks after she completes a manuscript to work on her "project of the heart," before she starts the next book she's contracted for. She also tells of a friend who works on her contracted work in the morning, when she's freshest, then draws on emotional energy in the afternoon for her spec work.

When you're not restricted by the voice (and reader expectation) you've created for your "regular work," there is freedom to experiment. You aren't having to fight the feeling that you've done this all before. Your writing becomes fresher. You might look on it as continuing education. Other professionals have to keep their skills updated. We're no different. Working on something entirely new might even revive your enthusiasm for the work you loved to begin with.

And love it, we must. If we didn't, we'd find another way to make a living. *NINK*

Note: Special thanks to Meg Chittenden, Denise Domning, Susan Macias, Vella Munn, Charley Perlberg, Lawrence Watt-Evans, Janice Young-Brooks, Cheryl Zach and the four writers who wished to be known as "another author" for so graciously sharing their opinions with me.

Christine Flynn first saw her work in print eleven years ago and has since sold 26 books. Her next release is *The Black Sheep's Bride*, due out from *Silhouette* in September.

"If one career crashes and burns...you'll have a back-up in place."

Lawrence Watt-Evans

Laptop of Luxury

By
JACK NIMERSHEIM

Writing is an art, a craft, and an addiction. Those of us who make our living stringing

words together on a page don't choose to write each day; we must write each day—every day. Our muse demands it. Normally, this is no problem. Each morning (or afternoon, or evening; the precise schedule varies from writer to writer) you sit down at your loyal PC and begin pounding away.

What happens, however, when you're forced to abandon the friendly environs of your everyday workspace—as would be the case, for example, if you must participate in a promotional tour or writer's workshop, or even something so mundane as a holiday visit with relatives—and write on the road? Sure, you can pack a legal pad and a handful of #2 pencils, as writers have done for decades. Or, you might consider a second, more modern, alternative; adding a laptop computer to your writer's toolbox.

There's never been a better time to buy a portable PC. The cost of laptop computers has plummeted recently, even as the features they offer rise at a dizzying pace. With a bit of wise shopping, it's possible to secure a lot of "bang for your buck," to quote an overused cliché. But how much "bang" does the typical writer need? And how much "buck" should you expect to spend? Read on, and I'll attempt to answer these critical questions.

(Warning: Any discussion of computers must, by its very nature, include a "tech-spec" section, containing all those dry numbers that promise to make your eyes glaze over and your brain cells cease firing. Well, get ready. Here comes mine.)

The actual "bang" a writer requires from his or her computer is small. Processing words demands very little

PC power. Continuous keyboard entry, a cut-and-paste here, a spell check there, and that's about it. A first-generation, 8088-based IBM-compatible system

There's never been a better time to buy a portable PC.

can easily handle such tasks. Unfortunately, the programs that run the programs we rely on while writing are a bit more demanding. Text-based, DOS-dependent applications are a thing of the past. Today's software for IBM-compatible computers, including the most popular word processors, runs under Windows, a graphics-based operating environment that requires at least a 286 microprocessor (CPU), a megabyte (MB) of random access memory (RAM), and several megabytes of hard disk storage. And those are just the requirements for Windows 3.1. The newest Windows, Windows 95, ups the ante even higher. If you opt for Windows 95—and its growing acceptance as the new "standard" for IBM-compatible systems promises

to force this decision—you'll need, at the very least, a 386 system with 4 MB of RAM and 30-40 MB of disk space. A 486 CPU and 8 MB of RAM make even more sense. For

either Windows, a practical starting point for a hard drive is 200 MB; more is better.

(At this point, I should explain that it's not my intention to ignore Macintosh users in this discussion. Mac portables are designed specifically for the Macintosh operating system and applications that run under it, a fairly homogeneous environment, so an awareness of their technical specifications is far less critical than that required by someone shopping for an IBM-compatible laptop, which represents a much more diverse marketplace.)

The good news is, the introduction of Intel's Pentium (586) processor has lowered dramatically the cost of systems built around the older, 486 CPU. Only a few months ago, you could expect to pay upwards of \$2500 for a decent 486 laptop capable of running Windows 95. Now, it's possible to find one for somewhere around \$1500. Not exactly "chump-change," to be sure, but not a price that will force you into Chapter 11 bankruptcy, either.

Writers are...prone to forming...a personal relationship with their PCs.

A computer is more than its tech specs, however. Writers are especially prone to forming what might best be described as a personal relationship with their PCs. Your computer is, after all, a colleague in the creative process—an electronic collaborator, if you will, which you'll depend upon to keep your creative juices flowing freely. Its screen must be easy to read, its keyboard comfortable to use. Otherwise, you'll dread sitting down to write; and so, you probably won't. In these areas, a particular laptop can transcend seemingly modest technical specifications, or fall miserably below expectations based on the latest "gee whiz" technology it contains.

For this reason, it's never a good idea to purchase a laptop sight-unseen. Visit several computer stores in your area and check out their offerings. If a certain model piques your interest, ask a salesperson to turn it on and fire up a word processor. Any word processor will do, even one as rudimentary as Windows' Notepad or Write. All you're interested in at this point is the "look" and "feel" of the machine. How legible is its display? How much adjustment does it allow in brightness and contrast settings? Does text bleed into the background, or is it crisp, clear, comfortable to look at? You'll spend countless hours staring at the display of whatever model you ultimately purchase, so such considerations are significant.

Equally significant, perhaps even more important, is how comfortable you feel entering text into a laptop's →

Lap of Luxury

(Continued from page 9)

keyboard, the primary purpose for which any writer uses a computer. Keyboards vary greatly from laptop to laptop. Some are so cramped, their keys positioned so close to one another, that even the most delicate fingers would have a hard time striking only a single key at a time. Others come close to mimicking the arrangement, even the tactile sensation, of a stand-alone computer keyboard. Keyboard preferences are extremely personal. No universal design exists that will satisfy all writers. It's critical, therefore, that you sample the keyboards of several different laptops, test them under "real world" conditions, entering text just as you would sitting at your primary PC. Touch typists, in particular, will want to find a keyboard that allows them to take full advantage of their skills.

Most laptops today incorporate into their keyboard design some type of pointing device—a trackball, touchpad,

or similar mechanism that allows you to interact with a graphics-based operating environment such as Windows or the Macintosh System 7. For reasons

It's never a good idea to purchase a laptop sight-unseen.

that remain a mystery, certain manufacturers seem to derive some perverse pleasure from placing these devices where they're guaranteed to interfere with text entry. A trackball is located right where you place your palms while typing. A mouse button sits where it is inadvertently pressed each time you shift your hand enough to reach the numeric keys.

Such design oversights, while rarely fatal to the writing process, can be frustrating. When the muse strikes, you expect to concentrate on keeping the words flowing, not navigating your keyboard. Once again, personal preferences come into play. I have friends who are quite content with pointing devices that I find impossible to use, either because of their inherent design or their placement, in relation to the rest of the keyboard. How comfortable you feel using the machine you ultimately purchase will be determined largely by how much you investigate, before you invest. Remember, once you fork over the cash and take a laptop home, it's too late to decide that you don't like its design.

After you're satisfied with the "look" and "feel" of a particular brand or model, it's time to begin considering what "extras" you want your laptop to include. Not all options are available for all models, but most manufacturers provide a variety of choices, when it comes to configuring their product.

First off, you'll need some way to transfer any work you do on the road to your desktop PC. One approach is

to employ what was once referred to as a "sneaker net." This method entails copying files from your laptop's hard drive to a floppy disk, then copying them a second time from the floppy to your desktop PC. (The image behind the name is that of someone in sneakers running floppy disks all over a large office, an oft-used method of transferring files between systems before networks became common adjuncts to the stand-alone PC.) This is an easy, low-tech, procedure, but ease does not always imply convenience. Equipping your laptop with a serial port will allow you to use an inexpensive utility like Traveling Software's LapLink to transfer files directly over a serial cable, thus eliminating the need to constantly swap disks between a laptop and desktop PC.

CD-ROMs are all the rage, these days. Thousands of programs, ranging from the Encyclopedia Britannica to the latest multimedia fighter-pilot simulator, are now available on these ubiquitous plastic disks. The former, and titles like it, serve as marvelous (and marvelously compact) research tools, placing a library of information literally at your fingertips; the latter and similar games can provide a much-needed break in the midst of an extended writing session. CD-ROMs have become such a popular data-storage and distribution medium that many manufacturers now offer laptops which include a built-in CD-ROM player. Be aware, however, that a CD-ROM adds several hundred dollars to the cost of a portable PC. You'll need to weigh price against prize, when determining whether a CD-ROM is a necessary component of your mobile office. If you simply can't do without access to CD-ROMs, consider buying an external, portable drive. Such units connect to a computer through its parallel port, and can be used with both your laptop and desktop PC.

A modem keeps you in touch with the world, as you travel through it. Including a modem in your laptop configuration allows you to continue your on-line activities—checking electronic mail, participating in on-line "chats" and conferences, uploading and

downloading messages through bulletin boards and commercial services—while you're traveling. Commercial ser-

A CD-ROM adds several hundred dollars to the cost of a portable PC.

vices like America Online and CompuServe provide local access numbers in most large cities. Many commercial services also offer nationwide access through an 800 number, although using this convenience usually adds a surcharge to your normal access fees. Unless you subscribe to a national Internet service provider, you won't be able to sign on to the Internet through a local telephone number from a location other than your home or another phone within the same calling zone. Of course, you can always place a

long-distance call to your normal access number.

There are two kinds of modems: internal and external. An internal modem is installed within the laptop itself, its telephone jack built into the computer's case. An external modem can be connected to the computer through either a standard serial port or a PCMCIA slot, depending on what type of external modem it is. The obvious advantage of using an internal modem is that it eliminates the need to carry an extra piece of equipment, if you plan to go "on-line" while on the road. Prices for modems have dropped dramatically over the past few years. A 14.4 modem—that is, a modem capable of transmitting and receiving 14,400 bits of data each second—will add anywhere from \$150 to \$200 to the price of your computer. A slower modem may cost less, but will be inadequate for anything other than connecting to services that use text-only interfaces, few of which still exist.

Laptops...can serve... as both your home and road system.

To this point, I've been assuming that you're interested in purchasing a laptop to complement your desktop PC. This needn't be the case. Many lap-

top computers include connectors, or ports, for an external keyboard, a monitor, mouse, and other peripherals. These ports are built into some models; others provide them through a "docking station" that, in turn, plugs into a special connector on the laptop. Laptops that include such external ports can serve double-duty, as both your home and road system. At home, you enjoy the convenience of using a standard keyboard and display. When it's time to travel, you simply unplug a few cables and, voilà, you're ready to go, and carry all of your work with you.

As I said earlier, there's never been a better time to buy a laptop computer. Somewhere, there's a portable PC that's perfect for your needs. Shop wisely, ask the right questions, and you'll find a laptop that lets you be as productive on the road as you are at home. Then, the next time the muse calls, you'll be able to respond, regardless of where you happen to be at the time. *NINC*

Jack Nimersheim has written 27 books and more than 1,000 articles on technology-related topics. Also a fiction author, Jack was nominated in 1994 for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Science Fiction Writer. His 1995 short story, "Moriarty by Modem," which made the preliminary Nebula ballot, was also nominated for a HOmer Award.

Elections Notice

Proposed Slate of Officers for 1997

President	Victoria Thompson
Vice President	Steven Womack
Secretary	Candace Schuler
Treasurer	Phyllis DiFrancesco

Proposed Nominees for 1997 Nominating Committee

Nancy Varian Berberick	Julie Kistler
Lillian Stewart Carl	Marj Krueger
Robyn Carr	Emilie Richards McGee
Patricia de la Fuente	Margaret Evans Porter
Carole Nelson Douglas	Vicki Lewis Thompson

As set forth in Article VII, Section 4 of the Bylaws, additional nominations may be made in writing if signed by the nominee and at least 10 active members who have not signed the nominations of any other person for the same position. Such nominations must be made by August 20, 1996. Mail all written nominations to: Victoria Thompson, 563 56th Street, Altoona PA 16602-1233

Great Job, No Pay

When you look at your proposed slate of NINC officers for 1997 above (You didn't look? Well, go ahead. I'll wait.) Back now? I'm sure you noticed there's no candidate for newsletter editor. That's because we voted last year to make it a Board-appointed position, and now the Board is ready to appoint. Hey, come back here! Before you go skulking away, listen to this: Next year's editor will also have two Board-appointed assistants who will be in charge of soliciting articles.

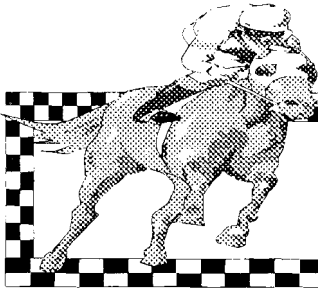
Believe me, this is a very cool job. I've loved every minute. It's also been a lot of work, but this new plan will make all the difference, so I urge you to consider volunteering by contacting NINC President Victoria Thompson. If the editor's job seems too big for you at this time, consider volunteering to be an assistant. I promise you'll have fun.

— VLT

Internet Plug

The "Next Page" feature that used to run in *NINK* now will run online on the NINC web site. This is a way for members who aren't online to have the advantage of online promotion. You can have your new book listed free-of-charge for three months—current month, last month and next month. If you wish to avail yourself of the free publicity, e-mail, fax or surface mail **author; psuedonym, if any; title; publisher; ISBN and month of release** to: Neff Rotter, 190 Belgrave Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94117-4228; phone (for questions) 415/661-5025; fax 415/661-5703, and my e-mail address is neff@sfo.com.

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. 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	June 2	June 9	June 16	June 23	June 30
Catherine Anderson	<i>Keegan's Lady</i>			138n	111	119
Mary Balogh, Miriam Minger	<i>Timeswept Brides</i>		101n			
Sandra Brown	<i>The Witness</i>	13	16	26	22	23
Sandra Brown	<i>Exclusive</i>					19n
Dixie Browning	<i>The Baby Notion</i>				144n	
Shannon Drake	<i>No Other Woman</i>	92				
Kate Freiman	<i>The Bachelor and the Baby Wish</i>		102n			
Kathleen Eagle, Joan Hohl	<i>Men of Summer</i>				135n	145
Julie Garwood	<i>The Bride</i>	68	63	117		
Linda Howard	<i>Shades of Twilight</i>			16	16	37
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Legacy</i>	136				
Debbie Macomber	<i>Sooner or Later</i>	58	111			
Anne McCaffrey	<i>Freedom's Landing</i>	81	110			
Amanda Quick	<i>Mischief</i>		33n	48	78	92
Christine Rimmer	<i>No Less Than a Lifetime</i>		109n			
J D Robb (Nora Roberts)	<i>Immortal in Death</i>			104n	107	125

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.

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.



EAST OF THE HUDSON

The Belly of the Beast

Now it can be revealed: Your faithful correspondent has just returned from a long and dangerous secret mission behind enemy lines.

Actually, the writer I live with and I just got back from two different excursions, one to Chicago and Nashville and the other to the eastern banks of that great cultural divide called the Hudson River.

That's right, friends. I spent six whole nights in NEW YORK CITY!!! and lived to tell about the experience.

I return from these two trips babbling with insights, some of which may surprise, some of which may amuse, all of which are as earnest as I can make them.

In other words, this is what it's like INSIDE the book business.

EOH I

New York is an old place, lots older than I remembered. New Yorkers are making a valiant effort to keep it together, but the streets are rougher than Main Street, the buildings smell older and mustier; even the \$300-a-night hotels and the cultural landmarks like Sardi's have a more than faintly dowdy look to them.

New York is also less like the rest of America than any place I can think of on the North American land mass.

Not worse than, or better than. Just different.

It's still efficient, as long as you have money. We stayed in a small hotel on the Upper East Side (east of Central Park and north of the Metropolitan Museum of Art) and never once did we wait more than three minutes for a cab, a meal or a bellman. The service was routinely pleasant and even the cabbies have learned to speak passable English.

And the food! There were no fewer than five good restaurants within 200 feet of the front door of the hotel. French, Italian, American grill, yuppie deli and high-end seafood. And we aren't even talking midtown here; we're talking neighborhood bistros.

But bring money, please, or don't come at all. Sixty bucks for a bottle of wine is standard. Dinner for two? A yard and a quarter. Dollar bills are pennies; fives fly like little birds and twenties are the standard denomination of commerce. The Italian place with its excellent antipasti and veal was cash-only, a policy that may irritate the IRS but seems to work for the Mob.

Money is in charge everywhere. Hotel rooms are \$250 a night and that's not really \$250 a night because the city tacks on another \$50 a night in taxes that nobody ever mentions when quoting you a rate. There are no supermarkets, no Costcos. Living in New York means paying

convenience-market prices for everything from razor blades to toilet paper.

That means a New Yorker has to make \$100,000 a year or else live in the nether regions of Brooklyn.

And we all know how much, or how little, editors make.

Which brings me to a further observation:

I'd Rather Be a Writer

People work damned hard in publishing and they do so in difficult surroundings. Corporate offices are always a little uptight but New York corporate offices are hell-holes. Then, at the end of the day, you walk out onto decaying streets redolent with the smell of garbage and you rub shoulders with the truly wealthy and the truly powerful. You ride the subway while they ride liveried limos and car-service sedans. You eat a hot dog from a cart, unless you are on an expense-account lunch, while they spend two hours at Michael's or La Cote Basque.

No wonder editors get irritable. I'd go ballistic in a week, maybe less.

Editors are at their desks by nine or nine-thirty. Many of them don't leave until seven and then, often as not, they go home to singles apartments or to an empty condo because their significant other is working late or on a business trip to Europe or Florida or The Coast.

New York is a hard grind in an in-your-face town. Editors and publishers live in a pressure cooker. The book business is extremely volatile at the moment. We who write 'em already know that, but at least we can sit on the back porch at the end of the day and toast the sunset. In Gotham, you're lucky to see between two century-old brownstones in order to catch a glimpse of sunset reflected on the murky waters of the reservoir in Central Park.

In short, I no longer think about the ten percent I pay my agent to put up with The City. For my money, it's the best bargain in town.

The Big Show

The talk in the aisles at the American Booksellers' Association convention in Chicago had mostly to do with Random House, the no-show, and who would be the next not to come.

The betting I heard was that Simon & Schuster may well bow out of future conventions. The costs are high and the return limited, particularly since the trade show is sponsored by an organization of cranky independent booksellers who delight in suing publishers over discount rates and advertising allowances.

The publishers were always polite, even to the independent from East Bumblescratch who is on credit hold



EAST OF THE HUDSON

with everybody except Ingrams (another cash-only business) and who sucks up free booze at cocktail parties and grumbles when he can't have two \$30 advance reader copies, one of which he probably will rent out.

The shakeout continues in the book business and everybody is getting bruised, so don't feel like the Lone Ranger when your royalty check isn't as big as you thought it ought to be.

The convention itself was as big and noisy as ever, maybe bigger, when one considers all the side halls full of regional and specialty publishers and university presses. Lots of new books being showcased for the fall and spring lists, tons of freebie advance reader's copies and complimentary, glow-in-the-dark R. L. Stine key chains. Even chances to get your snapshot taken with Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Cindy Crawford or Fabio.

Oddly, the people who seemed to be missing were the writers. Our friends at RWA had a hospitality booth tucked away in a yonder corner and there were perpetual long lines at 30 autographing positions in the signing hall, but nowhere did I see writers being mobbed.

Much public and media attention was lavished, not on writers but on celebrities whose names appeared on the covers of books that, likely, were written by someone else. The long autographing lines seemed to have been generated more by free hardbacks, less by a genuine interest in meeting the people who put words on paper.

Similarly, I didn't see any books being showcased that I absolutely had to have. I did pick up a couple of mildly intriguing novels, including a Waller-wannabe that suggested the subgenre is growing.

But I didn't see anything that broke new ground, not even among the small publishers. I sometimes get the feeling everyone in the book business is holding his or her breath, waiting for a new trend to pursue.

I think I made the same comment about last year's ABA, and the one the year before, as well. That was the one where I last saw my old friend, Tim Leary, the LSD guru.

I was right about Tim. He was dying. In fact, he held on two years, which is longer than I expected. He looked worse than the book business looks, but at least he was able to laugh, right up to the end.

The New Beast

Nashville, a week after the ABA, was quite different. The Nashville Convention Center is not as big as Chicago's McCormick Place, but it was a good deal more lively and purposeful.

The event was the annual convention of Anderson

News, one of the big winners in the consolidation of independent distributors that's going on in the United States.

We've all been watching the breakdown of the old Independent Distributor system wherein small news agencies informally agreed to stay out of one another's territories, thereby cutting the entire nation up into little fiefdoms.

A year ago, the system cracked; supermarket chains put their business out to bid, winner take all. Now, suddenly, there are fewer than half as many IDs as there were in 1995 and a dozen of the giants control the sale of paperbacks in 80 percent or more of the country.

Anderson is one of the remaining giants. In the past nine months, the firm, headquartered in Amarillo, has absorbed no fewer than 55 IDs in other areas of the country. Anderson jobbers now stock racks in supermarkets, drug stores and news stands all over the country.

They also stock music racks in such outlets, which is why the convention is held in Nashville, the Mecca of country-western music. That's why Sony and Warner Records and the rest of the music companies fly their biggest, hottest acts in for the Anderson convention.

Clint Black, John Cougar Mellencamp, All for One, and several other pop/rock/country acts all gave concerts, gratis, for the nightly convention banquets.

Just our way of saying thanks, rack jobbers.

This year, book publishers got into the act. Every major publisher in the country was represented at the convention. Every house showcased their top romance authors, as well as other mass market writers, and every one of them paid cash for the privilege.

Even Fabio was there, and let me tell you, the guy is impressive. He hugged rack jobbers and posed for snapshots for five straight hours and never broke a sweat.

(I know, I pick on him. But I also genuinely respect his work ethic.)

Like the rest of us, Anderson has a tiger by the tail. It's a family-owned firm that has been able to buy up failing IDs for pennies on the dollar. Now it has to reorganize those territories, raise its level of service and still try to make a profit on contracts with supermarkets that want deeper and deeper discounts.

No wonder the central theme of the convention was "WE ARE FAMILY." That kind of artificial spirit of communion is necessary to get thousands of people marching the same direction, which is, after all, how corporations must function if they are to continue to exist.

In other words, the Anderson convention is a sign of the shape of things to come in the book business. Bigger and bigger decisions are being made by fewer and fewer people, whether we as writers like it or not. I honestly can't tell you whether those kinds of decisions are going to



EAST OF THE HUDSON

be more rational than the ones they supplant. All I know is that they are being made.

A pal of mine, a long-time book traveler for a mass-market house, stared into his third Heineken's during the John Cougar freebie concert and chuckled.

"You know, they talk about the book-distribution system back there in New York," he said. "Well, I'm here to tell you there ain't no such thing.

"There ain't no book distribution SYSTEM. What there is right now is book distribution CHAOS. Nobody really knows what's going on.

"We're all kind of interested in how it's going to turn out."

So, dear friends, stay tuned. Next time, I'll give you a little tour of Ingram's, which truly is the Beast.

— *Evan Maxwell*



All That History...and Cheesecake

Everyone should have received a conference brochure by now. If you haven't, please contact Kate Dooley right away (KateDooley@aol.com) or 2015 Tanglewood Road, Bridgeport WV 26330, tel (304) 842-5975.

Meanwhile, Binnie Sybil Braunstein is putting together information on what to do when you're out and about in Baltimore. Here are just a few of her ideas.

Within easy walking distance of our hotel is Baltimore's famous Inner Harbor. Its Harborplace Light Street Pavilion is filled with food stalls and restaurants, from seafood (a Baltimore tradition) to fruit fantasies. There are also countless fun things to buy. Shoppers will find stores and stalls featuring local specialties and sports memorabilia of all types. Celebrate Baltimore, Geppi's Comic World, Maryland Bay Company, and much more. Harborplace Pratt Street Pavilion (at a right angle to Light Street) features men's and women's fashion and accessory shops, as well as gift stores and several restaurants...including The Cheesecake Factory. If that's not enough, The Gallery at Harborplace has more shops.

Binnie also recommends Lexington Market, the country's oldest continuously operating market, with a bazaar-like atmosphere offering all kinds of food and flower stalls, and historic Antique Row, a century-old shop and residential neighborhood offering over 35 antique shops featuring anything from books and brass to silver and toys, Medieval and Renaissance through art nouveau and art deco.

If shopping holds no appeal, Baltimore is filled with museums and other cultural and historic attrac-

tions. Right in the Inner Harbor are the National Aquarium, home to more than 5,000 specimens of aquatic life, the Maryland Science Center and the Baltimore Maritime Museum. You can also visit the 1840 House, a reconstructed row house which offers "hands-on" history programs, or the Peale Museum, built in 1814, the oldest building in the Western hemisphere specifically designed to house a museum, or the famous Walters Art Gallery. You can also easily find your way to the Star-Spangled Banner Flag House and 1812 Museum, housed in the home of Mary Pickersgille, who hand-sewed the flag that flew over Fort McHenry, or the Cab Calloway Jazz Institute, or The Homewood Museum, a restored 1801 Federal-style mansion built by Charles Carroll.

Into sports and sports history? Check out the Babe Ruth Museum, The Lacrosse Hall of Fame or Camden Yards, home of the Baltimore Orioles.

Special offering: Bruce Wilder of Turn the Page Bookstore is willing to set up a fun, informal signing for anyone who wants to stay over and venture an hour-and-a-half from Baltimore to the beautiful hills of western Maryland, which are spectacular in October. Make arrangements directly with Bruce by emailing him at TTPAGEBC@aol.com, calling him at 301-432-4585, or faxing him at 301-432-4589. And be prepared for the terrific mini-bookstore Bruce is providing at the conference itself!

— *Carla Neggers*



A question I've been asked a lot recently is: Where do writers hang out on line? The answer is: Lots of places! As far as I've been able to determine, the online service with the most authors actively participating is still GENie, primarily on the RomEx (romance) and SFRT (SF, fantasy, horror) bulletin boards. Both of these areas are bursting with up-to-the-minute industry info and thought-provoking discussions. CompuServe's Lit Forum is still a viable writer hangout too, and AOL's Writer's Club has grown dramatically over the past few months. As an alternate or in addition to online services, more and more writers are joining e-mail groups or "listservs." Our own Ninc-link is one of these, of course. As of July 1 (*before* anyone read my "rah-rah" column last month!), we had 68 subscribers, with the number growing almost daily. To subscribe (remember, you *must* be a NINC member) send an e-mail to nincklink-d-request@cue.com with nothing in the subject box (or type a period if your system won't allow that) and the word **subscribe** in the message box. Once subscribed, you can opt for a digest version or select only certain topics to receive.

After a computer upgrade, I've finally done some web-surfing of my own and found a few interesting sites I'd like to share with you.

<http://www.purefiction.com/pages/res1.htm> is geared toward writers and gives a wonderful overview on how to do research on the Internet. If you save and print out this page (actually several pages long), you'll have a great primer in hand for future forays into the Net.

Then there's the Spider's Apprentice (<http://www.monash.com/spidap.html>) set up by our own Linda Barlow, which rates, analyzes and explains search engines and gives tips for using them.

<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/3223> is another, less comprehensive guide to searchers.

The most commonly used (and comprehensive) search engines seem to be Lycos (<http://lycos.com/>), Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com>) Hotbot (<http://www.hotbot.com>) and Altavista (<http://www.altavista.digital.com>).

Check out <http://www.dejanews.com> for a look at the newsgroups available on the Internet.

And a couple of places to list your own credits are The Writer's Edge (<http://www.nashville.net/~edge>), an index of authors, agents, genre sites, publishers, associations, etc. (It was still rather incomplete when I checked it, but had some great links.) Also, the Amazon.com online bookstore (<http://www.amazon.com>), where you can fill out an interview form for readers to view.

Finally, a couple of late-breaking tidbits of online news: AOL has just instituted a new "20/20" pricing tier for frequent users, where \$19.95 gets you 20 hours of access time. They still offer their basic rate of \$9.95 for five hours (\$2.95 for additional hours on both plans), but for anyone using more than seven or eight hours a month, the new plan is cheaper. By the time you read this, a new writers' colony, Painted Rock, should be up and running on the Internet and it sounds very comprehensive. You can e-mail carmel@paintedrock.com for details and subscription info. (I hope to have more on this for next month's column.)

Well, that's it for this month. Remember to e-mail me at BrendaHB@aol.com if you have any news for upcoming columns or questions you'd like me to address. See you online!

— Brenda Hiatt Barber

Nightmare Sitcom Retooled

Following a pilot show that bombed, the Brooke Shields character in NBC's new sitcom "Suddenly Susan" will be a magazine writer, not a romance book editor. While the change *might* be due to Catherine Coulter's outrage as expressed in *NINK* last month, reports in the press indicate that Shields considers a book editor too passive to be a successful sitcom character. ("Dream on," Brooke.)

— VLT

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