

Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 7, Number 10

October 1996

Lionhearted: Trick or Treat?

By VICKI LEWIS THOMPSON

LionHearted Publishing, Inc., based in Zephyr Cove, Nevada, has produced its first novel more than two years after it began acquiring manuscripts. Lucy Grijalva's *Undercover Love*, a contemporary romance of about 70,000 words, can be obtained by mail order for \$5.99 plus shipping and handling, which brings the cost of the book to \$7.00.

The book also contains order blanks in the back for a six-pack of books to include Grijalva's for \$29.95 plus \$3.55 shipping and handling, which means a reduction in cost for individual books...if there were other books. As of this writing, there were not.

According to Kim Heathman of LionHearted, the company had planned to publish all of the books in the six-pack at the time Grijalva's book was published, but a loss of funding prevented that. He anticipates having the other five books available by October. "The key word here is *anticipates*," Heathman said. If the expected funding doesn't come through, the books will not be available, he said. When the funding is secured, "we're prepared to move a thousand miles an hour," Heathman added.

In the meantime, if customers send in the order blank for the six-pack and their check for \$33.50, LionHearted offers

(continued on page 11)

Who's Afraid of

Ghosts?

By
CONNIE LAUX

Now that I think about it, my first brush with ghostwriting came in college. I was taking an honors English course on Shakespearean drama and wrote what I was sure was the most brilliant and definitive criticism of *King John* that had ever been penned. (As a matter of fact, looking back on it, I'm pretty sure it still is. If Kenneth Branagh ever decides to put the play on the big screen, he will, no doubt, call me in as a consultant.)

A friend from a neighboring college got wind of the news (Could it be because I bragged about it to anyone who would listen?), and asked if she could "use" the paper for an English course she was taking.

Ghostwriting? Not exactly. After all, there was more than a little dishonesty involved. But when I was asked to write this article about ghostwriting, the incident came to mind, maybe because in a lot of ways, the process is the same: a writer doing work that's published under someone else's name.

Today, more than ever, ghostwriting is a phenomenon that's widespread in the publishing industry.

Why?

In the January 1994 issue of *Novelists' Ink*, Alex Thorleifson asked the same question in an article titled "The Phantom of the Word Processor: Ghostwriters Unmasked." Thorleifson explored the practice and came up with a troubling conclusion: ghostwriting was just another sign of the moral malaise that was sweeping the nation. It was dishonest. Deceitful. Misleading. Right up there with cheating on your spouse, lying to the IRS and letting your buddy "borrow" your paper on *King John*.

[Ghostwriting is] another opportunity in an industry that is uncertain at best.

But that was then. And this is now. And the differences between the comments Alex heard from authors and the ones I gathered make it clear that the writers who are ghosting don't think of it as dishonest at all. They see it as I do, another opportunity in an industry that is uncertain at best.

Along with everything else in the world around us, the publishing industry has changed since 1994. The numbers of (continued on page 7)

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Homepages for Sale!

As we promised several months ago, Novelists, Inc. now has homepages available for sale to our members. We have found a designer who will create your homepage for you, and of course those who are able can design their own. But the best news is that you don't even have to be online to take advantage of this offer! Your page will be linked with the NINC webpage which will also be linked with the Internet bookseller Amazon to facilitate the sale of our members' books. Read more about these exciting new opportunities in the "Online" column on page 12.

Conference Survey Results

The Board has carefully considered the results of the conference survey we sent out several months ago. Obviously, the membership believes that the conference should be held in New York City on a regular basis. The only question remaining is *how* regular. The majority of respondents to the survey wanted to hold the conference in New York every other year. However, the total number of people who wished to hold the conference in New York less frequently (i.e., all the other choices combined) was much larger, leading the Board to the conclusion that most of our members would like to go to New York no more often than every third year. We also examined the reasons people gave for their choices, and after analyzing them, the Board has decided to wait until the year 2000 to return to New York after our initial visit there in 1997.

By the time we are ready to select a site for the 2000 conference, our New York conference will be over. At that time, you, the members, may decide you didn't like going there at all and don't want to go back. Or, you may decide you want to go there more often than you thought. In any case, future boards will be making a more informed decision about how often to hold the conference in New York.

In the meantime, we hope to have a very exciting location for the 1998 conference to announce when we all get to Baltimore!

Subscriptions to NINK

As you may know, for several years now, we have offered nonmembers subscriptions to the NINC newsletter. At a recent meeting, the Board reconsidered this policy, and we have decided to discontinue the sale of *Novelists' Ink* subscriptions.

Although we know that much of the information in *NINK* is of interest to other industry professionals, we are concerned about diluting our focus. The Board feels it is vital for us to concentrate exclusively on the needs of the published writer, but if *NINK* goes to agents, editors, booksellers and

This Month from the President:

- Designer Homepages now available
- New York, New York is a wonderful town... occasionally
- NINK subscription policy change
- Last Call to Baltimore

NINK is one of the biggest benefits of ...membership, and we were unable to discover any other professional organization that makes its newsletter available to nonmembers.

even unpublished writers, we are afraid that our original purpose might eventually become diluted. Receiving *NINK* is one of the biggest benefits of NINC membership, and we were unable to discover any other professional organization that makes its newsletter available to nonmembers. For these reasons, we have decided we will no longer offer subscriptions.

Current subscriptions will be honored, but they will not be renewed, and current subscribers have already received a letter from us notifying them of the change in policy. *NINK* will NOT return to being confidential, of course. Members are always free to share information in *NINK* with others who might benefit from it and to show

the newsletter to potential new members as an incentive for joining.

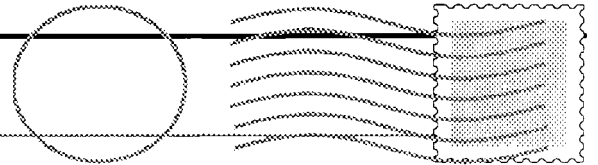
Conference

It's not too late to come to the conference. If you'd like to go but haven't sent in your reservations yet, please contact our conference planner, Kate Dooley, about registering at the door. Her address is in the conference brochure.

And to everyone who is already registered: See you real soon!

— **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.

The List is History

My local independent bookseller recently held a celebratory sale for their regular customers after *PW* named them Bookseller of the Year. Among the books I picked up at the sale was *The #1 New York Times Bestseller* by John Bear, a fascinating time-travel through post-WW II publishing history in this country.

In addition to detailing all the books which appeared at #1 on The List during its first 50 years, the book provides a wealth of background information on subjects

which *NINK* has featured articles about (including ones which I've been asked to write): how the list is compiled, and whether or not it's accurate; what makes a bestseller, and can bestsellerdom be bought?; how has The List—and publishing—changed since WW II?; how does appearance on The List affect a career?; and so on. For trivia buffs, the book also includes a plethora of fun facts: the oldest, the youngest, and the deadliest writers ever to become *NYT* #1 bestsellers; the shortest and the longest titles ever to make #1; the percentage of #1 women writers in every decade; the longest and shortest stays on The List; etc.

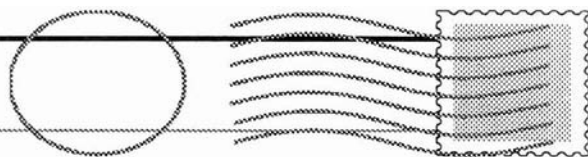
Finally, for those of you, who, like me, are pressed for time, I should add that this is a perfect bathroom book, something to be read one page at a time when you, er, need to kill 30 seconds.

— **Laura Resnick**

Find the Pony in the Dung

Evan Maxwell's column is consistently wonderful. I always read it right after the Letters to the Editor, and sometimes I even read it first!

In response to his latest "East of the Hudson," I just wanted to say that the dialogue with Esther Dyson in the *NY Times Sunday Magazine* in July had the exact >>>



opposite effect on me that it did, apparently, on Evan. Far from making me feel morose or chilling me, I thought it was about the niftiest piece I had read in a long time. I've been having visions of the (publishing) future for some time now, and Dyson's interview put into words what I'd been thinking and took me the next step. For me it boiled down to this statement of hers: "You no longer need a publishing house to get a book published." That sounds to me like the *good news*.

Evan writes that he got into this business so he wouldn't have to play huckster all the time. Acknowledging that Dyson may be right, he then laments that "we are living in the last golden age of writers, when you could put words on paper or a computer screen and then rely on those other folks, publishers, to take care of the commerce." The word that caught me in that last phrase was *rely*. Rely? Rely? When could we (that is, that vast subsection of us who aren't bestsellers) ever rely on "those other folks, publishers" to take care of anything but their corporate profitability, overhead costs, and CEO stock options? And in the past 12 years of publishing 15 novels with three different commercial publishers, I've had to play huckster all the time. So has Evan. Under Dyson's "new business model," we'll only be huckstering differently. Some of us already are. *More good news*.

Hey, Evan, I'll be really disappointed if you don't rant at me in return.

— Julie Tetel Andresen

She'll Take Manhattan

After reading Evan's August "EOH," I realized that once again I had screwed up. I was in Manhattan the same time Evan was and also stayed at an East Side hotel, but—stupid me—I only paid \$149/night + tax, for a double. As we were checking out, the President of the U.S. was checking in, so I guess it was an okay place.

There were several good restaurants and cafes around our hotel, too, and plenty more a little farther away, but, yet again, I goofed up. We never paid more than \$70 for dinner for two with a couple of drinks, and the great Italian place we found took plastic as well as paper. The only place that didn't was what was supposed to be a "delightful" diner across from our hotel, and the food was so bad the Mob would be too embarrassed to own it.

Our cabbies were also pleasant and spoke comprehensible English, even the native New Yorker. We never waited more than a few minutes for a cab, either, but then we only took a few because—gasp!—we WALKED. There we were, out there on the mean streets, walking 20, 30, 40 (short) blocks at a time, even at midnight! And, silly us, we were never even annoyed by anyone, much less mugged. (Granted, a mugging would have been hard to

pull off with all the other foolish people out enjoying a late-evening stroll, too.) The air wasn't good old Albuquerque smog, but I didn't notice a strong eau de garbage, either.

Not only did we walk, we rode buses and—yes—even the subway, although not the latter at night; apparently we did have some sense. Lucky for us, no one penetrated our disguises of non-New York-bought clothes and accents and publicly denounced us as dreadful provincials; in fact, a few locals evidently even more dumb than us asked us for directions and bus schedules.

NYC is expensive, but it offers a lot for the money: the Mets—opera and museum, not the semi-baseball team; Broadway—on and off; great food, shopping, neighborhoods, other assorted museums and architecture; Central Park; free sidewalk entertainment. Most of the big-city basics are the same, though. Cabs and public transportation are very reasonable and tipping rates the standard dollar/bag to the bellhop, dollar to the doorman for getting a cab, 10% to the cabby, 15% to a server, a few dollars to the concierge for making reservations, etc. And, if you're looking for that famous NYC "attitude" from service personnel, I'm afraid you'll have to go to Santa Fe, NM.

New York isn't a foreign country nor is it the American Mecca of sophistication and culture and all of us from west of the Hudson—garsh, shucks—hicks. It's not everybody's favorite "city," but it is, like it or not, the headquarters for our business. I happen to love it, but as much as I like to visit, I wouldn't live there. But then I've visited Anacortes, too, and lovely as the city park is, I wouldn't live there either.

— Patty Gardner Evans, *West of the Pecos*

Showing Covers May Backfire

On the subject of carrying our books to conferences, I first learned that other people view this unfavorably about ten years ago—and like everything else I learn, it came the hard way! I had just received the cover proofs for my third historical romance, and on the back of the wrap cover was a small drawing which I found deliciously Freudian. The partially clad heroine was kneeling before the hero who was shirtless but still wearing his six-gun strapped to his hip. The heroine's hand was on his gun. Like I said, deliciously Freudian. I took the cover to a conference at which I was speaking and showed it to a select group of people (mostly other published authors) who I thought would appreciate the joke.

Most of them did appreciate the joke, but others were appalled that I was "showing my cover around the conference," something they considered in very bad taste. I'm not sure why they thought this. Perhaps it was perceived as bragging or immodesty or maybe they were just jealous. I don't know the reason and don't care to analyze it too



closely. (Freudian jokes are as deep as I go!) What I do know is that almost every other time I have seen an author showing a book or cover proof around a conference, I have also heard other people either making fun of or disparaging him/her for doing so.

The only exception to this was one NINC conference where an author brought a cover proof about which she was genuinely concerned. She sought the advice of her peers and some editors. They all confirmed her opinion, and she took this information back to her publisher and got the cover art changed. To my knowledge, that author received only admiration for her initiative, but as I said, this was the exception that proves the rule.

Perhaps if we all carried our books to conferences, no one would think it a cause for comment. I'm not sure why we would need to do so, though. As proof of our qualifications? But all NINC members are by definition multi-published authors, so it isn't necessary for us to prove anything to each other. So we know what books our friends have out? That's easy enough to find out if we are really interested. To impress editors from other houses? I wish that were possible!

Those who wish to bring their books to conferences should certainly bring them, but they should also be aware—as I learned the hard way—that not everyone will admire them for doing so.

— **Victoria Thompson**

Damn the Torpedoes

Christine Flynn's lead article, "The Muse Vs. the Mortgage Payment" (*NINK*, August 1996), was particularly on point for me. Wrestling with this very issue has taken up too much of my energy for too long.

I understand the rules of supply and demand in publishing. But the book that's tingling at the end of my typing fingertips doesn't seem to fit anyone's current demand except my own.

I am totally enamored with the time period between the 1890s and the 1920s, the years before and after WW I, when the entire balance and axis of the world shifted. But from all quarters, from agents, editors and other writers, comes the proclamation that this is a "dead time period" as far as Those Who Buy Mss are concerned. So what does a writer do if her heart is lodged in 1905 or 1915? To quote Denise Domning in the article, "The question becomes, does a writer follow her creative urges, or make a living?"

My husband earns our daily bread, though we live rather simply. I understand that many writers don't have this advantage, and I consider myself fortunate in this respect. But my '83 Renault is on its last wheels, and I'm itching to get back into print. Logic says I should consider

supply and demand and shoot for something with a better chance of selling, right? Well, I've never been accused of showing good common sense, so I've thrown practicality to the wind and started working on a book set at my favorite time.

It's almost like I can't not write this book. (Follow your bliss, and all that.) If it hits, hallelujah! If it misses, oh well. It seems I have to get this book out of my system in order to proceed to another book. And hope springs eternal: with the next millennium approaching, might we not expect an interest in the last turn of the century?

The thought keeps me going when my "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" attitude falters. My Renault should be so plucky.

— **Leigh Shaheen**

Book Lover's Lament

After reading Evan Maxwell's column (something I look forward to every month), I had to respond.

No more books? Forget about what it means to us as writers. As a reader, the thought gives me a chill. Whoever heard of curling up on the couch on a rainy night with a cup of tea and a computer? Doesn't anyone else out there love their full bookshelf like I do? Don't you take a favorite book down now and again just to look at it and hold it? I don't know if these "neterati" are talking about novels appearing exclusively on the Net in ten years, or 50, or 100, but I can't see it. Maybe I just don't want to see it.

— **Linda Winstead Jones**

To The Ramparts

Re: Evan Maxwell's (as usual) excellent column, if the copyright change under the U.S. Intellectual Property Organization is already a bill and due to be voted on in Congress, we should all be writing our Congresspeople, right away. We should let them know that many writers feel strongly about this change and see potential dangers in moving the copyright from the Library of Congress to the Department of Commerce, lumping us with big computer corporations and publishers, etc.

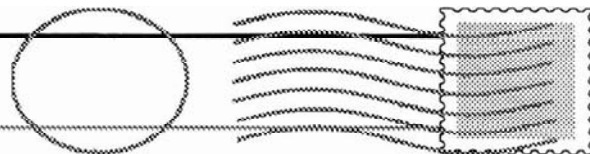
This is not an idle exercise: remember the flap several years ago when they wanted us to deduct expenses on a project-by-project basis? (Is capitalization the right term? Someone with more tax/accounting knowledge could tell us.) It was awkward and unworkable and writers protested loudly and en masse, and even though the law had already been passed, it was later changed. Surely we can do that again, if we speak up in time.

So, off to the ramparts with your computers and pens ready.

— **Cheryl Zach**

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Harlequin's History Detailed

I just finished reading *The Merchants of Venus*, the unauthorized history of Harlequin by Paul Grescoe, (Raincoast Publishing) ISBN 1-55192-010-7. I had bought it with the idea of reading it and hating it and reviling the author as much as I fully expected him to revile us as a group. Much to my surprise, the book is supportive of the industry, if a tad off the mark here and there (rarely, really). For instance, he seems to think Dell Candlelight Romances are still going strong in 1996. Maybe they are and I've been missing something, but maybe, too, he was given bad information.

He's frank in his discussion of how Harlequin and Mills & Boon argued over editorial decisions even after the takeover, of the battle for Simon & Schuster's great distribution system through Pocket, which eventually led to Harlequin's purchase of Silhouette. He's equally frank regarding Harlequin's failure to obtain Zebra, though perhaps a bit one-sided on that matter, because Harlequin's Powers that Be didn't want to discuss it openly with him, while Walter Zacharius did.

Since this is a history of Harlequin, which for so long was the romance industry, it's also a history of romance publishing in general. It makes no bones about the mistakes Harlequin has made (acknowledged by some employees and former employees), but also focuses on the strengths, the learning process the company has gone through, its downs as well as its ups. There is also a very up-front accounting of how some of the M&B writers were ripped off on their North American rights by the British arm of the company, and how difficult it was to get that straightened out.

As a romance author, it makes me wish I'd been in on the early days of Mills & Boon when people like Violet Winspear and Anne Mather were making mega-pounds when pounds were worth one helluva lot of dollars. It also made me feel a certain amount of pride in being even a very small part of such a far-flung industry, and gives me hope for the future of romance.

I can strongly recommend it as a learning tool for any writer, but romance writers in particular, not a how-to book by any means, but a how-to-understand-what's-going-on-behind-the-scenes book. I think all too often we, as authors, see the industry as something that happens between us, our editors and the art department, when in reality, we're such a small part of it as to be almost insignificant. I can only hope publishers in general remember once in a while that if it weren't for we who write the books for them, they wouldn't have their companies and be making the millions they are in wheeling, dealing, trading and picking up remunerative stock options.

— Judy Griffith Gill

(Ed. Note: When NINK went to press, *Merchants of Venus* was unavailable in the U.S. That may have changed, but if not, a copy can be ordered from Raincoast Book Distribution, Ltd., 8680 Cambie St., Vancouver, BC V6P 6M9, (604) 323-7100. The cost is \$36.66 (Canadian) with shipping. Shipping time is 8-10 days.)

Bantam Has Big Names, Too

Since Elaine Duillo did an exquisite job on the step-back for my October Bantam release, *Shadows and Lace*, I certainly agree with Bertrice Small's assessment of her talents. However, I'm sure Bantam's *New York Times* best-selling authors Amanda Quick, Iris Johansen and Betina Krahn will be crushed to learn that all the "BIG name historical romance authors" (according to Ms. Small) write for Dell, Avon, Zebra and Ballantine. Especially since Bantam publishers Irwyn Applebaum and Nita Taublib have ignored the gloom-and-doom attitude currently so pervasive in the industry and pioneered one of the strongest women's fiction programs operating today.

— Teresa Medeiros

Publishers Weekly Renewals

If you're part of the Novelists, Inc. group subscription to PW, you may have noticed "Dec96" on your address label. That does mean what you think it does: our group subscription expires in December—December 16, to be exact. Our new yearly group rate will be \$119, with an expiration date of 12/15/97. Since the individual rate is now \$149, that's a \$30 savings—more than half your yearly NINC dues, you might also notice. PW will soon be sending me a group subscription invoice, and I'll contact you for your check. If you receive an individual invoice, ignore it.

The group subscription is available to all NINC members. If you don't have a subscription now and want one or if you have an existing subscription and want to take advantage of these significant savings, never fear—just let me know (14201 Skyline Rd. NE, Albuquerque NM 87123; ph (505) 293-8015/fx (505) 296-9139). New subscribers will just fill out a form and send a check at the appropriate time. For current individual subscribers, PW will prorate your existing subscription, and you'll simply pay the balance to extend your subscription to December 1997.

— Patty Gardner Evans

(Continued from page 1)

available slots in bookstores is dwindling. So are print runs. Backlist titles are squeezing midlist authors off the shelves. Publishers are stockpiling less inventory. And that translates into fewer sales.

Does this make those who take advantage of opportunities in a tight marketplace deceitful?

How do other authors see it? I interviewed a number of them, all of whom have worked on ghostwriting projects. Because of contractual restrictions, I

***"I wouldn't recommend it
... for those who haven't
published extensively."***

Ted Schwarz

can't identify most of them. Such constraints bring up an important question. Is ghostwriting for the faint-hearted or for the author whose ego is easily bruised?

"Absolutely not," says Ted Schwarz. Schwarz has written more than 80 books, both fiction and nonfiction. About two dozen of them have been ghostwriting projects. "I do so many books under my own name, I'm not bothered by the projects that have other people's names on them. But I wouldn't recommend it for the unpublished, or for those who haven't published extensively. They couldn't handle it emotionally. If you get lucky and you do a lot of projects for other people, your name will disappear from the shelves. If nothing else, see if you can get a joint copyright."

A Novelists, Inc. member agrees. "I'm given credit as a co-author/collaborator," she says. "However, I'm not free to discuss the particulars."

An author who calls herself Casper the Friendly Ghost has a similar story to tell about her ghosting experience.

"My agent had a client who was a VP in a Wall Street firm. The client had a concept for a novel about a Wall Street family. My agent saw the promotion possibilities here: Wall Street book by a Wall Street insider.

***The money she makes
ghosting is "greater by far"
than what she receives
for books published
under her own name.***

"After working with her for two years, the agent suggested a ghost writer and approached me. On the positive side, the book would give me a mainstream credit if I ever wanted to move from romance to a broader market. On the negative side, the client had told her family, ex-husband and friends that *she* was writing the book, and I would be bound by contract not to reveal that I was the writer. My agent would be free to reveal this information to our publisher and to related professionals in the publishing industry."

Who's
Afraid of

Ghosts?

I have the best of both worlds. Last year, I was asked to write a book in the R.L. Stine's *Ghosts of Fear Street* series. Though my name isn't on the cover, it is listed on the copyright page of my book, *Fright Knight*. For me, it's not an ego thing at all. It's a matter of dollars and cents. I have no delusions. All the kids see is R.L. Stine's name on the front of the book. They never look at the copyright page. They never know it's me. But let's face it, if my name was on the cover, I would never have been on the *USA Today* list and the book wouldn't be in its third printing.

Under the terms of my contract, I am free to promote my book and to do book signings. Surprisingly, when kids see the book and I explain that I wrote it and show them my name, they buy it anyway.

Is money the driving force behind ghostwriting deals?

Most of the authors I interviewed said, quite candidly, "Yes!" though they caution that there are different payment methods. Some ghostwriting deals allow the author to earn an advance plus royalties, others pay only a flat fee.

***Is money the driving
force behind ghost-
writing deals?***

The book one author ghosted for a popular series is a perfect example. It was short and fun and the publisher provided the outline. Sound like a writer's hell? Not when you consider that though she was paid only a flat, write-for-hire fee, the author made more on that one book than she made on all three of her first historical romances combined.

An author who has an advance/royalty agreement echoes the same sentiments. She says the money she makes ghosting is "greater by far" than what she receives for books published under her own name.

Though it is not his first consideration, Schwarz mentions the monetary payback, too. "When it comes to writing nonfiction, I'm attracted to a project because it gives me a chance to learn about a subject that fascinates me and I get to make money at the same time."

Casper talks of money considerations as well. The book she ghosted for the Wall Street VP sold for an advance in the mid-five figures. It also sold in England. In both cases, the book earned out and paid a small royalty above the advance. It did well for everyone.

Perhaps too well.

In Casper's case, the success of her first ghostwriting project also spelled the end of her ghostwriting career.

"Both the American and the English publisher wanted another book from 'us,'" Casper says. "I sud- > > >

Who's Afraid of Ghosts?

(Continued from page 7)

denly realized that I could spend the rest of my career making a success out of the client. At the same time, I would disappear. To my readers it would appear that I stopped writing. If family and friends asked if I were still writing, I would say yes, but they would never again see a book with my name on it, and I would not be free to tell them that I was the writer on the client's books.

"Plus, the relationship between the client and myself would necessarily change. The first book was definitely a ghostwriting experience. The story idea belonged to the client; it was not anything I would have thought of or attempted. She shared liberally of her Wall Street experiences and was a strong research source for me during the writing of the book.

"But on any subsequent book, she had no contribution whatsoever to make. She didn't have another story idea. She didn't know how to plot or create characters. She couldn't write. The only thing she could contribute to further books was her name, which might build value based on my efforts."

Schwarz tries to head off such problems before they even start. "My ghostwriting experiences have always been very positive," he says, "because I've learned how to avoid the negative."

To do that, he asks himself three questions about every project that's presented to him:

1. *Is there a book? In other words, is the project marketable?* "By now, it's gut instinct," Schwarz says. "I have to have a feeling about a project. I have to know there's

something there that the public is going to want to read about. Otherwise, why am I doing it?"

***"It's fun to write books that generate vast publicity."
Anonymous Ghost***

2. *Is the other person bringing something valuable to the project?* Remember Casper's experience? The reason she decided to take on the Wall Street project in the first place was that the other person could provide valuable insight, a look inside the business that no amount of research could supply. Schwarz agrees. "It has to be something solid," he says. "Especially in fiction. The person you're ghosting for has to bring something very special to the equation, some background or expertise you couldn't find anywhere else. If you don't receive adequate input from that person,

you're going to end up feeling nothing but resentment."

3. *Does the other person want to be a writer?* "In any project, there has to be one voice," Schwarz continues, "and I have to be it. It has to be my baby, or it's not going to work." To make sure that happens, he sets up some hard-and-fast rules before he ever gets involved in a ghostwriting project. If his collaborators are technically knowledgeable, he demands that they be accurate. For his part, he realizes that if the person he's writing for or about is unique, he is obligated to capture their essence on the page.

"You have to work these things out before you ever sign the agreement," Schwarz says. "The person I'm ghosting for may have the

right to review my work and suggest changes, but I am in control. The other side of the coin is that I have to be able to look at my work honestly and ask myself if I'm doing their story justice."

Have our ghosts' experiences been positive or negative?

"Positive," says one. "I've been pleased with being allowed almost total control, and it's fun to write books that generate vast publicity. My own never do!"

I agree. Every bookstore I go into has multiple copies of *Fright Knight*. And because it's part of a series, I know it will stay on the shelves a long time.

"There are no pitfalls to ghostwriting," Schwarz says. "Not if you watch for the warning signs."

Casper would disagree.

"I said no to the second book with the Wall Street collaborator," she says. "I was not interested in doing further books with the client. A huge upset ensued. The client was terribly upset—said I was ruining 'her' career. My agent was very upset. She said she had a lot of clients who wanted to write mainstream books, but lacked the talent; and here I was, I'd proven I could write a successful mainstream but I wanted to write romances.

"I remained firm. Wished the client well in her writing efforts and in her pursuit of another ghostwriter or collaborator. Told the agent that I wished to pursue my own career."

But from then on, Casper says, the agent appeared to lose interest in her work. "She continually told me that she'd had lunch with such-and-so editor and the editor was very interested in seeing a mainstream proposal from me. I kept saying, 'But I want to write romances.'"

Things only got worse.

"Eventually I came to feel that I was diminished in my agent's eyes," Casper says. "She clearly was not interested in my romance proposals. She refused to submit two of my

***"Success at ghostwriting carries the potential to be as devastating as failure."
Casper the Friendly Ghost***

romance proposals to any editor as she said they were not saleable." Both books later did sell and one of them went on to be the best-selling book she'd ever done.

But when phone calls went unanswered and contracts lay on the agent's desk for weeks before she could find time to get to them, Casper fired her.

"I feel I had a very good and happy relationship with a fine agent before the ghostwriting project," Casper says. "Afterward, our relationship deteriorated swiftly."

In light of Casper's experiences, would our ghostwriters do it again?

Speaking for myself, "yes," and most of my colleagues agree with me.

"Absolutely," says another author. Schwarz has done so many ghostwriting projects, he obviously concurs. But he is practical enough to add, "You have to make sure it's the right deal for you from the start. If you're worried about your name being lost to your readers, think of this: There's no reason a fiction writer can't ghost in nonfiction, and no reason a nonfiction writer can't ghost fiction."

For all the problems, even Casper agrees there's an upside. "I don't regret my decision," she says. "It was an interesting challenge to write a genuine mainstream book. I'm proud of my work, and was thrilled that the book did well. I liked the client, and admired her restraint. It must have been very difficult for her to sit by and remain silent while someone else wrote a book that would go out with her name on it."

The benefits, she says, are that she learned she could write a successful mainstream novel if she ever wanted to. She found and hired a new and wonderful agent. She made a fresh commitment to her own career choices. The down-side? She lost a fine agent and for a time, she says, she felt depressed, frustrated and diminished.

"What my story reveals is that success at ghostwriting carries the potential to be as devastating to a writer as failure is generally viewed as being," she says.

"I could have ended up losing my own career and spending the remainder of my writing years building a career for someone else. When I look back on this experience, I thank my lucky stars that I did not permit the advice of others and the probability of high advances to overwhelm my own goals and career path."

Casper's opinions are reinforced by what another author says. "If you're a writer who needs the glory, this is not for you. Be aware that most readers won't be aware of your input. Also, some fellow writers frown upon ghostwriting. You have to have a thick skin."

"It's wonderful," Schwarz concludes. "But you can't have illusions."

My advice: don't short-change yourself or your own career goals. For me, ghostwriting is the perfect way to fill in those little gaps that always seem to come between the projects that do have my name on them. It's a chance to write things I usually don't write. An opportunity to take some chances creatively and try things I never would get a chance to try in my writing career.

And by the way, I never did let that old college friend "borrow" my paper on *King John*. Unlike ghostwriting, where all the parties involved know the terms of the agreement up-front, that would have been out-and-out cheating.

Besides, that paper was just too brilliant to let anyone else take credit for it.

But if Kenneth Branagh ever calls.... **NINK**

Connie Laux's most recent releases include *Saving Grace*, a novella in the *Angel Love* collection for Zebra, out in August 1996, and *Touched by Magic* from Zebra Lovegram, released in July 1996. Her next release is, appropriately, a ghostwriting project that must be cloaked in mystery. She would like to thank Ted Schwarz and all the other unnamed authors who contributed to this article.

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

Mary D. Curtis (*Mary Haskell*), Annisquam, MA
Alexis Harrington, Portland OR

Gwendolyn Johnson-Acsadi (*Gwynne Forster*), New York NY

Elizabeth Tunis (*Elizabeth DeLancey*), Rockville MD

New Members

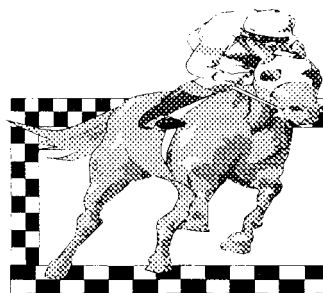
Cynthia Bailey-Pratt (*Lydia Browne*), Salisbury MD

Linda Covington Windsor (*Linda Windsor*, *Linda Covington*), Salisbury MD

Teresa DesJardien, Shoreline WA

Candace McCarthy, Dover, DE

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	Aug 4	Aug 11	Aug 18	Aug 25	Sept 1
Jill Barnett	<i>Carried Away</i>			51n	35	70
Jo Beverley (et al)	<i>Married at Midnight anth.</i>					64n
Rexanne Becnel	<i>The Maiden Bride</i>	133	104			
Sandra Brown	<i>Exclusive</i>	63	80	101	146	149
Sandra Brown	<i>The Witness</i>	51	63	127	142	
Stella Cameron	<i>True Bliss</i>	115				
Catherine Coulter	<i>Rosehaven</i>	117				
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Valentine Legacy</i>	20	44	74	98	146
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Heir</i>					130n
Diane Mott Davidson	<i>Killer Pancake</i>		57n	26	35	41
Christine Flynn	<i>The Black Sheep's Bride</i>		136n			
Julie Garwood	<i>The Wedding</i>	52	78	114	135	
Tami Hoag	<i>Cry Wolf</i>		62n	33	34	
Kay Hooper	<i>Amanda</i>		84n	53	72	92
Linda Howard	<i>The Mackenzies</i>	235n	86	148		
Cait London	<i>Tallchiefs Bride</i>				101n	
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Desert Rain</i>		45n	15	31	53
Linda Lael Miller	<i>Mixed Messages</i>		131n			
Linda Lael Miller	<i>Together</i>	139				
Jennifer Mikels	<i>Married...With Twins!</i>		137n			
Patricia Potter	<i>The Marshal and the Heiress</i>		144	139		
Nora Roberts	<i>Daring to Dream</i>	32	49	75	89	126
Nan Ryan	<i>Burning Love</i>			180n	137	

Trick or Treat?

(Continued from page 1)

a chance to join its network marketing team by paying an additional \$5 and receiving six of Grijalva's books to distribute. When they come off the press, the other five books will be shipped at no additional cost. The cover price listed for the books, which include both contemporary and historical romances, ranges from \$5.99 to \$6.99. They do not conform to a specified word count.

According to Heathman, customers who give away books which result in orders being placed will be qualified to receive referral fees. He said "most people" who have sent in checks have opted for that plan.

While some LionHearted authors believe in this alternative method of publishing in today's competitive market and are continuing with the company, others have lost patience with the pay-as-you-go approach in which no guarantee can be given as to when a book will finally see print.

Scarce funding has slowed or virtually stopped the payment of what in other publishing houses would be called an advance. At LionHearted, money due an author is termed a *minimum guarantee* of \$5,000 against the first 10,000 books sold. One quarter of that \$5,000 is to be paid upon signing, one quarter upon publication, and the rest 60 to 90 days after the book release month. LionHearted states that its goal is to have 100,000 monthly customers within three years. If that goal were to be met, and at the stated royalty of 10%, authors would earn approximately \$50,000 within the first 90 days of release.

However, some authors have complete manuscripts, which is all LionHearted will accept as a submission, that have been held for two years with no payment forthcoming, although the authors were notified that LionHearted had "bought" the manuscripts. One author scheduled to be in the original six-pack pulled her book, although it had already been reviewed in the industry fanzine *Affaire de Coeur* and had received a six-star rating.

Although no books appeared until the August launch of Grijalva's novel, a total of 18 LionHearted manuscripts have been reviewed by *Affaire de Coeur* during the past year with none rating less than four stars. Grijalva's story of a tough undercover cop and a schoolteacher trying to forget her poverty-stricken childhood earned her four-and-a-half stars.

Mary Ann Heathman, President and CEO of LionHearted, who "hadn't read a romance until five years ago," stated in an interview earlier this summer that she envisions the program as "women empowering other women" through the network marketing approach. The structure of the

company resembles other home-sales companies such as Amway, in which a growing network of buyers continues to feed revenue upward.

According to a Letter of Intent the company issues to authors prior to sending them a contract, "a new six-pack of books will be shipped monthly direct to readers and 'thank you for the referral' fees or commissions will be paid to five levels of sales representatives upline from that customer." Both romance readers and authors stand to benefit as representatives of the company, according to Heathman, but she emphasized that authors are not required to market their own books. An average romance reader, she explained, could earn "\$100 to \$200 a month" on the program.

In addition, Heathman believes that the waste associated with traditional publishing in which, according to her, 50 percent of books published are destroyed, would be virtually eliminated. LionHearted publications, sold by word-of-mouth rather than through the traditional channels of wholesalers, jobbers and retail stores, will stay in print indefinitely, she said. Foreign sales are also anticipated, according to the Letter of Intent, and will when feasible be handled with the same network marketing concept. *NINK*

(Ed. Note: I read Lucy Grijalva's book and found it to be a well-researched and well-written contemporary romance with sympathetic, believable characters. *VLT*)

New Railbird Found

Marilyn Pappano has graciously volunteered to take over "The Fast Track" for 1997. When the switch in railbirds is official, her name, phone, fax and e-mail address will be printed in the column so those of you who know you've made the list will be able to contact her and assist her compilation efforts, as you have been doing with Carole Nelson Douglas this year. Thanks, Marilyn!

Class Action Complaint Filed Against Dorchester Publishing

On September 13, 1996, a class action complaint was brought against Dorchester Publishing Co., Inc., L. William Black, and Book Margins, Inc., by Robin Lee Hatcher on behalf of herself and all others similarly situated. The complaint was filed in the U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York.

The complaint allegations include that Dorchester Publishing Co., Inc., failed to pay royalties due the plaintiff and members of the class, improperly withheld in reserve other monies due plaintiff and members of the class, and defrauded plaintiff and members of the class by improperly engaging in "special sales" agreements with Book Margins, Inc., such action substantially undermining regular sales and effectively destroying the interests of plaintiff and members of the class in their books.

For more information, contact Jerome Noll, Attorney at Law, 551 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10176, (212) 818-9150.



Remember last month I mentioned that Novelists' Inc. would be offering author web pages? That program is up and running now, and I've given over this month's column to our Internet Committee Chair, Alysse Rasmussen, so that she can explain it to you in detail. Take it away, Alysse!

Starting Immediately!

Who's Eligible:

Author HomePages are open to any NINC member, whether you have Internet access or not. (And trust me, folks, in the last year, I've seen the Internet grow at a phenomenal rate! You want to be on the Net.)

Bottom Line:

The cost of maintaining your Author HomePage at the NINC Website URL: <<http://www.ninc.com>> will be \$25 non-refundable set-up fee (one time charge), \$48/six months—that's only \$8/month—cheapest advertising around! (If you'd rather, \$96/year) The cost of having a page professionally designed will be \$150 (basic rate) for three pages (500 words), three graphics, 25 links, choice of color scheme and font, free updates every 60 days (200 words, one graphic), registry with major search engines.

Optional Add-Ons: Additional pages, links, graphics/images, updates, sound, JAVA, guest book, comments, counter, auto responder, framing/no framing option, and more — regular rate: \$50/hour, bells-and-whistles rate: \$75/hour.

How It's Going to Work:

1. Send a check, payable to Novelists, Inc. for \$73 to: Central Coordinator Randy Russell, Novelists, Inc., Box 1166, Mission KS 66222-0166.

2. The Central Coordinator will notify the "HomePage Boss" ;-) Patricia Maxwell AKA Jennifer Blake to send you a packet of materials (instructions, suggestions, tips and an explanation of the industry techno-babble, etc.) and the name of the HomePage Designer selected by the NINC Board to represent NINC's members.

3. The HomePage designer, Paul Meek, is a seasoned veteran. His company (VIS—Voice & Internet Services) has been in business for seven years! He has worked with writers before, and he comes highly recommended by all. He is very creative and easy to talk to. He will listen to what you want, design it for you, show you proofs, revise, etc....Or, if you feel overwhelmed (maybe even a little intimidated by all this Internet stuff), don't be afraid to say "Here's my bio. Here's a short summary of my books. Make it look good." Payments for the design of your personal HomePage will be sent directly to Paul at VIS. (You'll get all this info from the HomePage Boss (Pat/Jennifer).)

The Internet Committee recommends that your

HomePage be KISS (keep it simple and succinct :-), but Paul is certainly capable of adding all the bells and whistles you might like. However, you'll need to negotiate those items separately and there will be additional charges. When you accept the final design from Paul, he will notify us that your page is "up and running," and your six-month subscription will begin. You will be entitled to a free update every 60 days. The Internet Committee strongly urges that you make use of this free update. It will keep your pages from turning static and will ensure more frequent readership.

A Word of Caution About Bells and Whistles

The more "gimmicks" on a page (JAVA, shockwave or moving pictures of some demented person reading *Don Quixote* in the original Spanish, etc.) the more time it will take for your page to "load." Recent studies prove that Net Surfers are into speed, not bells and whistles. You'd be a lot better off to ask Paul to include a "text only" option...and it wouldn't cost near as much as a single bell or whistle.

The Denouement

Crisis, Conflict and Resolution...while it's true that only trouble is interesting in fiction, real life is another matter. Please bear in mind that this is going to be a learning process for all of us. The Internet Committee will value your feedback...but having lives of our own, we'll undoubtedly go through a number of knee-jerk, "duh!" reactions before we get the bugs all ironed out. So please, bear with us while we identify and straighten out the kinks.

For more information, please contact: Patricia Maxwell AKA Jennifer Blake, HomePage Boss/Coordinator, Box 9218, Quiltman LA 71268-9218, USA or PaMrJB@aol.com

— Alysse Lemery Rasmussen

Thanks, Alysse! Before logging off, I'd like to let everyone know that as of the start of September, the Ninc-link listserv boasts 109 members! You've read about some of the great topics we discuss there (I don't have room to list more this month, so you'll probably get a double dose next time). In case you didn't know, once you join the listserv you can request previous digests to sign up. Remember, to subscribe, just send an e-mail to:

ninclink-d-request@cue.com

with nothing (or a period) in the subject box and the word subscribe

in the message box, with YOUR name (as it appears in the NINC roster) and your e-mail address below that.

See you online!

— Brenda Hiatt Barber :)



EAST OF THE HUDSON

Expensive Wallpaper

The publishing industry's got a dirty little secret, according to the *New York Times*: it's called "returns."

The summer reading season has been, if not a disaster, at least a real disappointment, the *Times*'s Doreen Carvajal reported as Labor Day approached. Some new hardback titles have acted like boomerangs, with as many as 40 percent of copies shipped to bookstores coming right back, sometimes within four weeks.

Bernie Rath, executive director of the American Booksellers Association, said bluntly that publishers were creating "expensive wallpaper" by shipping far too many copies of some titles to bookstores.

The phenomenon is most clearly portrayed by a book called *Almost Adam*, a Morrow novel that attempted to cash in on interest in early man. Rumor has it that Morrow shipped 200,000 copies and bookstores sold 30,000.

(Let me help you with the math. That's a 15 percent sell-through, gang. Hardbacks should sell through at 80 percent, and nowadays, even mass-market paperbacks are being published in the expectation that 60 or 70 percent of all copies shipped will be sold.)

The *Times* report mentioned a number of explanations for the bounce-back books: Publishers have been overprinting, just to convince bookstores and readers that the books are genuine bestseller material. Chain stores are turning cold titles around much more quickly than used to be the case. Independent booksellers are using returns to pay their bills, since publishers still accept returns without penalty.

I've got another suggestion: The books didn't work for a big audience and/or weren't marketed well.

The *Times* named four books as real disappointments. I had picked three of those four as lame ducks long before the *Times* report was published.

First, Julia Phillips's *Driving Under the Affluence*, a follow to *You'll Never Eat Lunch in This Town Again*, looked derivative and weak. (Any time an author goes three or four years between books, and accomplishes nothing in the interim, you can figure the second book won't fly.)

Second, *Almost Adam* suffered from muddy graphics and a title that had to be explained. (Almost Adam who? Oh, *that* Adam, the one from the Garden of Eden. Now I get it. But what is this cover that looks like an ink blot? Oh, it's supposed to be an ape/human footprint. Now I get it.)

In the Name of Sorrow and Hope didn't hit the right buttons, either. The cover featured a striking young woman pensively staring off the page. She turned out to be the author, Noa Ben Artzi Pelossof, the granddaughter of the slain Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, but until

somebody identified her for me, I didn't catch her significance.

Only one of the *Times* flops was a surprise. I've always liked Martin Cruz Smith's work, ever since *Gorky Park*. So I was tempted to buy *Rose* when I first saw it, even after reading a review which described it as an historical mystery set in 19th Century England and Wales.

Then I saw it in the bookstore. The smoky, indistinct cover stopped me cold. Maybe I just like Smith on familiar ground, like Moscow. Maybe it was the fact he only writes once every four or five years. Whatever the reason, I passed on the book, but I was mildly surprised when I found out thousands of others did, too.

There I go again, judging books by their covers. Not really. I'm merely judging them by the cover message they send. In buying books, there's not much else you can do.

Following Up

A few months ago, I think I reported that Simon & Schuster would join Random House, St. Martin's and Penguin in boycotting the American Booksellers Assn. trade show held each June in Chicago.

That indeed happened, but now there is another ABA dropout, as well. Last month, Kensington Publishing Corp. announced it would not be promoting Kensington, Zebra and Pinnacle books at the 1997 show, concentrating instead on regional bookseller conferences.

That announcement came on the same *Publishers Weekly* page which reported that yet one more publisher, Rutledge Hills, had agreed to settle the lawsuit filed by the ABA. That suit targeted publishers who discriminate against independent bookstores in favor of chains and mass merchandisers.

In other words, the more the ABA wins, the more it seems to lose.

Another defendant in the suit, St. Martin's, settled later in the month and the ABA crowed that the settlements (everyone except Random House) would mean an additional \$12,000 in profit to an independent bookstore with business of \$1 million a year.

I'm not sure I trust that figure in the first place, but even if I did, I wonder if 12 grand one way or the other would keep a million-dollar business afloat.

Dilbert Lives

Now, children, it's fairy-tale time. Last month, I promised that if you were good little boys and girls, I'd tell you about the time I was kidnapped by aliens and taken to the Mother Ship, and I always keep my promises, even if I'm late sometimes.

In this case, the Mother Ship wasn't a flying saucer. It was the Ingram's Book Co. superwarehouse in > > >



EAST OF THE HUDSON

(Continued from page 13)

LaVergne, Tennessee. But the trip was still one of the weirdest experiences of my life. It's one every writer ought to make, for two reasons:

First, Ingram's handles somewhere between eight and ten percent of all copies of all books published in this country. They are our best customer.

Second, every writer needs to be reminded, once in a while, that there are a great many cogs in the book distribution system. Every time we all feel sorry for the sad plight of writers, we ought to remember that we could be order-takers in an Ingram's phone bank, instead.

Ingram's is the biggest distributor of books to the retail trade in the country. Besides LaVergne, outside of Nashville, the firm has two superwarehouses and five regional warehouses. Between them, these repositories stock 325,000 titles, some in lots as small as two copies, others in pallet-loads of 50,000 titles or more.

The LaVergne warehouse, recently remodeled and expanded, now occupies an area the size of nine or ten football fields, literally. At the heart of the operation, like the core of an atomic reactor, is a set of double-decked book stacks. They look like a cut-away version of the biggest library you can imagine, bigger even than the archives where the Government stored the Ark of the Covenant after Indiana Jones recovered it from the Nazis.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's go to the intake end of the system.

Book retailers can order from Ingram's electronically, computer to computer, or by fax, but the bulk of the orders still come in by phone. For Ingram's, the front line is the phone order center, which consists of 120 little, sound-deadened cubicles manned by \$7-an-hour clerks staring at computer screens, wearing headsets and conducting animated conversations with invisible telephone customers they never see face-to-face.

The clerks are really nothing more than intelligent interfaces between the customer and Ingram's inventory system, a computerized brain that can keep track of stock, availability and demand for virtually every book that has been printed since the Gutenberg Bible.

Actually, that computer is at the heart of almost everything that happens at Ingram's. A large, electronic signboard on the wall of the service center tallies the numbers of calls handled during each shift and keeps laggards informed as to the number of calls waiting. (It reminded me of the guy who used to beat rowing rhythms for the galley slaves who propelled Roman ships of war.)

On the supervisor's work station, another computer keeps track of the number of calls each clerk has handled and the length of time any particular clerk has been on any

particular call. (I don't know, but I assume laggards are zapped in their cubicles when they fall too far behind.)

Most of the clerks are young, mainly female and seemingly cheerful, rational human beings, once you pull the headsets out of their ears, but I was almost overwhelmed by the urge to shake each and every one of them and say, "Go home. Read Franz Kafka or Scott Adams. You don't have to spend your lives this way."

If the order center is a booby hatch, the warehouse itself is a modern ant pile of a factory. The building covers 550,000 square feet (a football field is just more than 57,000 square feet) and employs 350 people.

The inside of the facility looks like a giant kinetic sculpture, with perhaps three miles of rolling conveyors to transport orders finally out to the freight docks where somewhere between seven and ten UPS semis a day are loaded.

"Fill one up, run it out and back another one in," said an executive. "Lots of days, there is a parking lot full of trucks just idling, waiting to load and take off."

That's an overstatement, but on the heaviest day of the year, usually between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the LaVergne warehouse will load, box and ship 1.5 million copies.

All told, the numbers ought to help us as writers to maintain some perspective on the system of which we are but one cog. Next time you get upset about finding only two or ten or 50 copies of your latest at your local bookstore, just remember LaVergne. Just remember that selling a half-dozen copies in a store is less important than making sure that Ingram's has supplies of your book in all its warehouses.

Remember, too, that writers still have the most fun of anyone in the book business. There are thousands upon thousands of clerks and stockers and order-checkers, along with thousands of nebbishes in publishing offices, who do our brownie work for us, putting our books out where readers can find them.

And just remember those poor folks in the service center whose every transaction is measured and timed, whose every phone call may be monitored for accuracy and efficiency.

That's unfair, I know. Ingram's jobs are probably no worse than jobs at the Saturn factory up the road or the Hartmann Luggage factory just across the county line. It's just that the modern corporate work environment is chilling, demeaning and disheartening. No wonder so many of these clerks are avid readers.

They need us as much as we need them.

— *Evan Maxwell*

CD Has All the Answers

No writer should be without Microsoft Bookshelf 1996-1997, which is an incredible "answer machine" for almost any question you can think up. We recently purchased the Windows 95 version on CD, and quickly decided to keep it in the CD ROM drive practically all the time for instant access. (Note: this is not a good idea if your CD drive spins the CD disk all the time. Ours only spins the CD disk when we request information.)

Using Windows 95, we can easily jump back and forth between word processing, e-mail programs, solitaire, my thesis and the handy reference materials that are available in Bookshelf 96-97. The Bookshelf library, all on one CD disk, includes a *Concise Encarta 96 World Atlas*, *Microsoft Bookshelf Internet Directory 96*, *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Third Edition)*, *The Original Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, *the Columbia Dictionary of Quotations*, *the Concise Columbia Encyclopedia*, *The People's Chronology*, *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1996*, and a *National Five-Digit ZIP Code and Post Office Directory*. Wow, all of that information on a little platter that's smaller than the old 45-RPM records. The next time your local radio station asks a trivia question, just click your mouse on Bookshelf and type in the question. Bingo, you get your answer! How to be the tenth caller with the right answer is your problem.

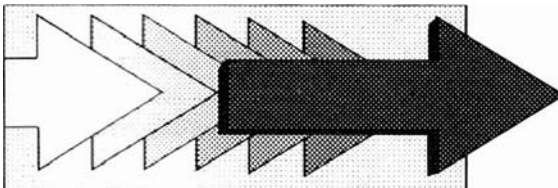
Quick! Who wrote "A Cup of Coffee, a Sandwich, and You?" Why, it was Joseph Meyer, Billy Rose and Al Dubin in 1925. It was performed 138 times in The Chariot Review at New York's Selwyn Theater. Who were Hester Piozzo and Cynthia Propper-Seton? (Hint, they did what you do.) It only took me about ten seconds each (using a 386SX) to find footnoted references for those questions. This actually ruins much of my fun because I

used to make up answers anytime my wife would ask me a question. Our daughter was a drama counselor at B'nai B'rith Perlman this summer, so when Vicki asked me what B'nai B'rith means, I typed it into Bookshelf 1996-97 and got several answers as soon as I entered the first apostrophe. A few days ago, I wanted to call my cousin, but couldn't find her phone number. I knew what town she lives in, but not the area code. By entering the name of the town, I got the zip code and the area code from Bookshelf in microseconds. Calling information took longer, of course.

Ready for some serious research? The Internet Directory has become indispensable as I do research for my thesis. When I needed Internet addresses for websites devoted to juvenile literature and human rights, I found addresses for more than 50 sites in the blink of an eye. That was on a 386SX. Our 486DX computer doesn't even give me time to blink.

We got Bookshelf 1996-97 at a discount club as part of a special, limited-time "Home Essentials" offer from Microsoft which included Word for Windows 95, Microsoft Money, and Works for Windows 95. The price? \$89.95! Microsoft does this once in a while to get people addicted to their products. I'm already addicted to Windows 95, so the "Home Essentials" package has been a great fix. The software practically installs itself, and if you have a modem (who doesn't?), you can register online during the installation process. Yes, register! When it comes to software, please practice the Eleventh Commandment, which is, "Remember thy copyright laws, and keep them wholly."

— **Jim Thompson**
(Victoria Thompson's husband)



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 published anonymously unless requested to allow members to bring up controversial issues related to the writing industry without concern.

I'm facing a dilemma: As a successful author (and family bread-winner), I need to know about the many threats that loom over my professional life. But as much as I need to know, I also need to write. And when I feel too threatened, I can't write.

Like Evan Maxwell, I read that article about "neterati" guru Esther Dyson in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, in which Dyson predicted that books will get washed away by the triumphant tide of electronic communications, authors will give up our rights to royalties, and we will earn our keep through live appearances. Actually, I read only about two-thirds of the article, at which point I got so angry and upset I put the magazine down.

An independent bookstore in my town recently advertised that it was starting a new policy for its customers: you buy a hardcover. If you return it, read or unread, within 30 days, you get a 40% discount on the next hardcover you buy. The returned books, meanwhile, will be rented to other customers. I telephoned the bookstore to register my concern, and then followed up with a calm, neighborly letter to the bookstore owner. I explained that when booksellers resell or rent books without paying authors any royalties, the bookstores deny us the income we need to feed our children and pay our taxes. The bookstore owner lacked the courtesy to respond to my letter. I was so angry and

upset, I vowed never to shop in that bookstore again—until I absolutely needed some research material for a writing project I was working on, and this was the only store within a reasonable distance that could supply the material without delay.

I should do more. I should lobby people, set up picket lines, run for office, storm the Bastille. I should change the world. There's only one problem.

I'm a writer.

So many aspects of the writing business make me upset and angry: Orrin Hatch is trying to revamp our copyright protections. My agent once again finds it's impossible to change an unsatisfactory clause in my contract. Superstores and indies are selling used books and shrinking my earnings. Indignities and injustices abound, making me angry and upset.

But I can't write when I'm angry and upset. For my writing to flow, I need hope, not anger, and I need to focus my emotion and funnel it into my work. When anger rules me, I don't write much, and what little I do write would have been better left unwritten.

So where is the balance? How do I fight the good fight without losing my ability to write the good write?

— **Barbara Keller**

Maybe a Union Is the Answer

This commentary appeared on NINC's online maillist, ninclink. Several people suggested it should appear in NINK, as well, so here it is. For information on subscribing to the ninclink, turn to the "Online" column, appearing on page 12 this issue. Ed.

My perception (not only from the NINC maillist but from dozens of conversations with lots of writer buddies) is that resentment against book publishers has never been higher. Many writers I know have crossed over from resentment to hatred. Can't blame 'em. In my short six years as a published novelist, I've found the business becoming more harsh and brutal by the week. Writing as a process and as work is wonderful, but never have I felt more bitterness at the business end of it. Many of my pals agree.

So somebody raises the question of a union and we all go "it'll never work; writers are too cantankerous, independent, (or fill-in-the-blank)." I've just had an experience that has changed my thinking on that issue. Recently, in my never-ending attempts to actually make a living at this, I got an ABC-TV movie assignment. As a result of this, I became a member of the Writers Guild.

Actually, they came after me. Two weeks after signing the contract with the production company that hired me, I got a letter that said "Congratulations on your new contract. Your membership package and bill for the initiation fee is on its way."

In short, it's a closed shop. You get work. You join the union. A no-brainer. And the initiation fee is \$1500. So there was at the least some ambivalence on my part. But as I've learned more about WGA and how it works, I find myself becoming more and more of a union man. Some examples, thanks to the Guild:

1. *Payment for a writing assignment is NOT based on the acceptability of the manuscript.* You get hired to write a screenplay; you turn it in; you get paid. That's it. And if you don't get paid within 15 days, the union starts charging interest (all of which goes to you; the union

doesn't keep a cent of it).

2. *A producer gets pissed off at you and fires you (or loses his job and the new guy doesn't like you), that's cool.* You still get paid. That's it. And quickly, or the interest starts mounting.

3. *For every dollar the producer pays you, he pays an additional 13 cents to the Guild,* which covers your free health insurance, your pension plan, and a strike fund which you can draw on if the nastiness starts.

4. *A producer has to bring in another writer on a project after you've worked on it, he can't take your name off the credits.* In fact, on all Writers Guild consignatory production company productions, it's the Guild that determines who gets credit. Not the producers....

5. *The Writers Guild Minimum Basic Agreement* is a 400-something-page document that is impossible to read, but which sets generous pay scales and lots of protection for its members, including things like payments for residuals, etc. that may not even be in your contract.

These are just a few of the more shocking things I've learned since joining the Guild. The Writers Guild protects writers and forces producers to treat us if not with respect, then at least with caution. Imagine if we had this in the book world. My guess is we'll never have it as long as the Steve Womacks of the writing world want it. When the Patsy Cornwells and the Stephen Kings, Mary Higgins Clarks, and Tom Clancys sign on, then we'll be ready to kick some ass. Which is precisely what we need to do, in my humble opinion.

In the Writers Guild manual, there's a short piece on the history of the Guild and how it was founded. One anecdote described a group of writers meeting with Irving Thalberg to negotiate as a union.

A furious Thalberg said "Writers are artists! They don't need unions! Plumbers need unions!"

Somebody in the back yelled "Yeah, and plumbers make more!"

— Steve Womack

See what you've been missing? Join ninclink now! VLT

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