

Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 7, Number 12

December 1996

The Pacman Principle: Wholesaler Numbers

Shrinking

Renewal's in the Mail:
Don't miss out on a
single issue of NINK or
a daily online digest of
Ninmlink. Send in your
membership renewal
promptly when you
receive it this month.

The times, they are a'changin', and nowhere is that more apparent than in the wholesale distributor industry. In early 1994, there were 300 independent distributors nationwide, and they had their own industry trade association, the Council for Periodical Distributors of the Americas. Today, the count of total IDs is uncertain, because, as Steve Linville, Book Manager for Adams News in Seattle, said, "Everyday there's consolidation taking place." It is generally agreed, however, that the number is now somewhere in the neighborhood of 84 and still dropping.

"I think in two years we'll probably be down to about 15 major distributors," said Jerry Sanders, buyer for the Northern Division of ETD Kromar in Dallas. "About 50 years ago there was one company called American News. They were the big dog in the country and that's how the independent distributor got started. They kind of spun off, and IDs sprung up all around the country. Things have come full circle again, and who knows what can happen after that."

The CPDA closed its New York office earlier this summer, so the independent distributor industry is without an industry publication, although former CPDA president John Harrison has started his own newsletter, *The New Sin-*

By
SUSAN ANDERSEN

gle Copy. (The CPDA newsletter was the *Single Copy*.) He speculates that before too long 10 to 12 IDs will control 90% of the chain business, with 30 to 40 other companies serving niche markets.

This ongoing shakeup began sometime in the summer of 1994 when the Safeway and Albertson chains decided to reduce their rosters of magazine wholesalers that supply major supermarket chains with both books and periodicals. Before then, territories were determined primarily by geography, with each wholesaler servicing the area where it was located.

Following Safeway and Albertson's defection from their local suppliers, drug chains, mass merchandisers and convenience stores quickly jumped on the vendor consolidation wagon. "If you can have one supplier that bills you with one bill and who services you and all of your stores, that is obviously more efficient than having 18 different suppliers bill you and having to send out 18 different checks," said Robin Kidd, grocery, drug and general merchandising coordinator for Kroger Co.'s Mid-Atlantic marketing area. Kroger's recently consolidated its 18 vendors down to a single supplier, Anderson News of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Not even publishers know at this point what the consolidation will ultimately mean for the book business. Walter Zacharius, head of Kensington (continued on page 5)

**"I think in two years
we'll probably be
down to about 15
major distributors."**

**Jerry Sanders,
ETD Kromar buyer**



Inside: Reports from Balti-

more 8 // Plus: President's Column

2 / Letters 3 / NINC's RT Award Winners 7

/ Fast Track 12 / Dispatches from the Front:

Qualitative Sorcery and Other Sorcery of the Modern

Age 14 / NINC Notes 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 Bernhardt
Marianne Shock†	

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

1996 Board of Directors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

† Founder

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

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

It's that time again, when I get to brag about all we accomplished this year and praise everyone who worked so hard to make Novelists, Inc. the best writers' organization around. So here goes:

Newsletter:

From the ovation she got at the conference when I mentioned her name, I know everyone in NINC appreciates the great job Vicki Lewis Thompson has done on the newsletter this year. It just keeps getting better and better, and Vicki is not only responsible for soliciting the many wonderful articles we had this year, but she also was instrumental in giving *NINK* its new look, designwise.

Conference:

Many thanks to Carla Neggers who not only did the normal work of a Conference Coordinator but also trained our professional Conference Planner, Kate Dooley, in the NINC way of running a conference. Both of these ladies did an outstanding job and made the Baltimore conference one that people will long remember. Read all about it elsewhere in this issue!

Internet Project:

Many people have worked very hard getting our various Internet projects up and running this year. Bill Bernhardt conceived the idea of a NINC webpage and mailing list and got us online. NINC Vice President Patty Gardner Evans took over the project early in the year and became our chief troubleshooter and researcher until we were able to find a volunteer to serve as chair of the project. Alyse Rasmussen graciously accepted the job, which turned out to be a lot bigger than any of us imagined. She and her very able crew of helpers have redesigned the webpage, added "The Next Page," where members can list their upcoming releases and linked our Webpage to Amazon, an online bookseller where people can buy our members' books. They have also turned the maillist into a forum of stimulating discussion. Special thanks to webpage designer Eileen Buckholtz, Maillist Coordinator Elizabeth Thornton and Mary George (who are, of course, the same person but who do the work of two!), "Next Page" Editor Neff Rotter and Homepage Coordinator Patricia Maxwell/Jennifer Blake.

Agent Projects:

This year we published an updated *Guide to Agents*. Debbie Gordon started the project, re-designing and expanding the survey after getting input from members and agents. When Debbie had to step down, after the surveys had already been collected, Advisory Council Representative Marianne Shock took over and finished compiling the mountain of material with

This Month from the President:

- *NINK* Ovation
- *First Professional Conference Planner*
- *Linking Up on the 'Net*
- *Agents' Guide Expanded*
- *Audit Report Coming*
- *Sites Announced*
- *Unsung Heroes*
- *Best for Last*

Unsung heroes keep NINC Committees operating smoothly for all of us.

the help of her very able committee: Nancy Elliott, Shirley Parenteau, Carol Cail, Dorothy Cannell, Janice Kaiser, Vella Munn, Judy Myers, Charley Perlberg, Lynda Ward and Steve Womack. Chair Marianne Shock also serves as NINC's Liaison to the Association of Author's Representatives.

Also under Agent Projects, Pat Rice collected contracts from various agents and submitted them to Publishing Attorney Elaine English who analyzed them for us, as reported in *NINK*. The cost of the various Agent Projects was paid out of Author Coalition Funds.

Audit Lottery:

Another project that Authors Coalition funds paid for was the Audit Lottery. Georgia Bockoven and her committee undertook the difficult task of determining which entries were qualified for auditing in the first place and then selecting the winner. Georgia and her committee had to devise the procedures as they went, and we are all grateful to them for figuring out the fairest and most manageable way to conduct the lottery. The winning author was published by Harlequin, and our auditor Andrew Mitchell had to travel to Switzerland in September for the proper information. We are eagerly anticipating his final report which will be published soon.

Site Committee:

The intrepid Julie Kistler went on two site committee trips this year, first scoping out New York City for the 1997 conference and then traveling to Lake Tahoe to check out sites for 1998. She and her assistant, Pat Kay, found us wonderful hotels for both conferences, and we just want to apologize for sending them to such awful places. (That's a joke.)

Others:

Many other committees work very hard throughout the year without having any glamorous results to show for that work. Their labors are essential for keeping NINC operating smoothly, however, and we couldn't do this without them. Among the unsung heroes are: Zita Christian, Outreach chair, who publicized NINC to other writers' organizations; Maggie Osborne, chair of the Nominating Committee (and the rest of her committee, too!), who

came up with an outstanding slate of officers for 1997; Kristine Rolofson and her committee who counted the ballots; Janice Young Brooks who chaired the Bylaws Committee and drew up the amendment creating the job of President-Elect; Emilie Richards McGee who chaired the Advocacy Committee and Connie Rinehold who conducted our annual audit.

Saving the Best for Last:

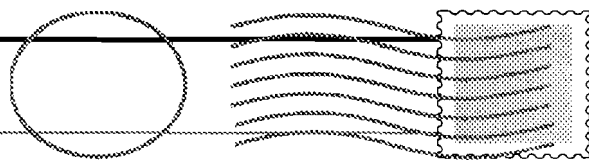
And, finally, my personal thanks to the rest of the NINC Board of Directors who never failed to come up with the solution to every problem or the great idea that saved the day: Vice President Patty Gardner Evans, Secretary Sandra Kitt, Treasurer Phyllis DiFrancesco, Newsletter Editor Vicki Lewis Thompson and Advisory Council Representative Marianne Shock.

— *Victoria Thompson*

Members: to obtain a copy of the full minutes of the Board of Directors' meeting, send \$2 plus SASE to the P.O. Box. For an updated copy of the Bylaws, send \$2 plus SASE. For a copy of the Treasurer's Report, send \$1 plus SASE to the P.O. Box.

First Dues Increase in NINC History

The NINC Board of Directors announce the first dues increase in the eight-year history of NINC. We have tried diligently to keep the operating costs of the organization to a minimum, but we have been forced to finally admit that we can no longer operate at our current level of service to members without increasing our annual dues. Effective January 1, 1997, our annual dues will be \$65. New members will also pay a \$15 application fee. Your dues renewal notice will be arriving soon.



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.

Sued Chapter Needs Help

As some of you know, a lawsuit was filed on June 26, 1996, against Washington Romance Writers, Inc. (WRW), and most of its 1995-96 Board of Directors, including Mary Kilchenstein, Harriet Pilger, Courtney Henke, Mary Jo Putney, Lydia Lee, Eileen Buckholtz, Cheryl Bacon, Ann Kline and Karen Smith. The suit was brought against the organization and the individual Board members by the former treasurer, who disagreed with the Board's handling of a then-disputed bill from the hotel at which WRW held its annual retreat. WRW and the hotel representatives quickly and cordially settled the disputed bill on WRW's original terms; the organization could not have been more pleased. The former treasurer, however, continues to pursue the lawsuit.

The suit asks for \$7.5 million in compensatory and punitive damages and demands the liquidation of WRW's assets. The Board is confident of a favorable outcome to this suit and is vigorously pursuing its defense.

Your help, whoever, is urgently needed.

WRW's Directors and Officers liability insurance carrier has denied coverage on the grounds that the suit arises from a breach of contract dispute (i.e., the disputed hotel bill), which is not covered by the terms of the policy. Although on August 29, 1996, the judge ruled that D.C. has no jurisdiction over the individual defendants, it is too soon to predict further developments. Moreover, the organization has now entered into the lengthy and expensive process of discovery. Accrued legal costs are already in the tens of thousands, and the resources of the organization are woefully inadequate to meet these costs.

On August 14, 1996, The Amiga Foundation Trust fund was established to support Washington Romance Writers in its time of need. The Amiga Foundation Trust is totally separate from and independent of Washington Romance Writers, Inc. The purpose of the trust fund is to assist WRW and its individual Board members who have

been sued with the payment of all legal fees and costs associated with the suit, including the costs to WRW of keeping its membership informed about the case. Funds from the trust will go equally to benefit all defendants (WRW and the individual Board members collectively).

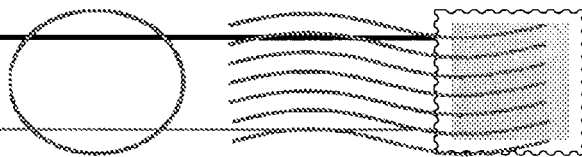
The basic terms of the trust are set forth in writing in a document signed by the Trustee and the initial contributor, Melinda Helfer, for many years a friend of WRW and a supporter of the romance genre. The trust will operate as follows:

1. Dianne MastBrook, a certified public accountant independent of WRW, will act as Trustee, managing all the funds and making decisions regarding distribution in accordance with the agreement.
2. Anyone may make a contribution to the trust in any amount. While real or tangible property cannot be contributed, proceeds from the sale of either may be given. Contributions are *not* tax-deductible.
3. Both income earned on trust assets and the principal of those assets will be available to cover the costs of the litigation.
4. Administrative costs of operating the trust will be deducted from trust assets, including the compensation paid to Ms. MastBrook for her services as Trustee.
5. No contributor may impose limitations on the use of the funds other than as stated in the agreement, and by making a contribution, the contributor is deemed to have agreed to all the terms of the trust.
6. Annual reports will be prepared showing all trust operations. These will be sent to all who have contributed cumulatively more than \$500.00.
7. The trust will last until the litigation is finally over. If there are any assets remaining in the trust at that time, they will be returned to contributors in proportion to their total contributions.

Potential contributors who wish to review the trust agreement may do so by contacting Melinda Helfer (410-569-2837). If you would like more information about the lawsuit, you may contact a member of the WRW executive committee established to handle issues concerning the suit. This committee includes Deborah Barnhart, WRW President (703-931-7507); Harriet Pilger, Vice President (703-893-5483) and Mary Kilchenstein, Immediate Past President (301-424-3262 or 410-792-9978).

As past presidents of Washington Romance Writers, we perhaps more than anyone know what a positive difference the organization's existence has made to its members during its 15-year history. We also believe it is not going too far to say that WRW has earned the respect and the reputation for professionalism it has among the romance community at-large. Now, everything WRW has come to

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



stand for—indeed its very existence—is in jeopardy. As past presidents we feel called upon to take a stand to protect the organization.

WRW needs your help. The Amiga Foundation Trust can accomplish its purpose only with your support. Please donate to the fund. You may give as much or as little as you wish; any amount is deeply appreciated. Your check should be made out to The Amiga Foundation Trust and mailed directly to:

Ms. Dianne M. MastBrook, CPA
Trustee, The Amiga Foundation
c/o Cappiapaglia & MastBrook
2960 Chain Bridge Road, Third Floor
Oakton VA 22124

We thank you in advance for your much-needed support.

Past Presidents of Washington Romance Writers

- Donna Kauffman
- Linda Hyatt
- Susan Brack
- Gay Cameron Snell
- Kathleen Karr
- Catherine Healy
- Kathleen Gilles Seidel

Wholesaler Numbers Shrinking

(Continued from page 1)

Press, said recently in *Publishers Weekly*, “in two years, it could work out fine, or there could be real problems.” He said he expects to see heavier than normal returns from the IDs for much of 1996, and Kensington, which once was highly dependent on the ID market, has effected changes so that it now receives 65% of its business from non-ID accounts. The turmoil in the ID market was one factor in Zacharius’s venture into publishing inexpensive paperbacks solely for Wal-Mart.

When asked what the impact of the ID consolidation would be, Steve Linville of Adams News said, “Initially, there’s a big realignment as everyone adds or changes their distribution, so there is always the possibility of dropping the ball somewhere, in the amounts you order, for example, which can be way too high or too low. And until you build some history in your distribution, there’s a possibility of one: losing sales or two: generating returns.”

When *NINK* attempted to contact some of the wholesalers around the country, the changes became very evident. Lesniak was acquired by Pacific Periodicals. A Portland wholesaler is in the process of being bought out by a former distributor out of San Antonio. Southern Michigan News Co. is now under the umbrella of Stohl Corporation. Southeast Periodicals and Book Sales, Inc. is now part of Anderson News, which has absorbed no fewer than 55 IDs in other parts of the country. Dixie News is now a depot


for the Jim Pattison Group, and its centralized buyer is several states away. Martin News Agency in Dallas is now part of ETD Kromar, a conglomeration of 18 distributors in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Arizona. They purchased several companies and at the same time merged with two others. “We are what they call, I guess, a player in the market now,” said Jerry Sanders, a buyer for seven of their agencies.

Adams News in Seattle hasn’t bought up smaller companies, but their territory has nevertheless expanded. “It used to be just the greater Seattle area,” Steve Linville said. “Now it covers most of Western Washington.”

The IDs’ method of doing business doesn’t always remain the same either. Linville said, “Adams News Company is one of the last wholesalers in the country that actually had a driver Book Operation out of bookmobiles, with drivers who went in the stores and

served the accounts. Starting around the first of the year, we went to an over-the-line distribution system, which took the actual servicing of book racks from a traditional driver who worked for Adams News, to a customer service rep that’s hired to come into the store and put the product away. We’re generating orders in the warehouse. For us, it’s a whole new way of operating. A lot of wholesalers have been on that system for ten years.”

“It’s a relearning process for a lot of peo- >>>



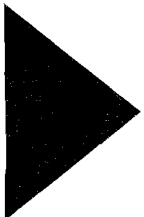
**Anderson News has
absorbed no fewer
than 55 IDs in other
parts of the country.**

Wholesaler Numbers Shrinking

(Continued from page 5)

ple," he said when asked how knowledgeable are the reps now racking the books. "But what we've tried to do to not feel the full impact of that is try to take the knowledge that's still available and turn it into an information system that takes up the slack. And we try to feed our reps with info on local authors and do the distribution in here (the warehouse) to cover that."

There is no denying that the buying of books is in fewer and fewer hands these days, but in many ways it is business as usual. When asked what their main criteria for order size was, Don Duncan, Buyer for FEC



"We try to feed our reps with info on local authors."
Steve Linville, Adams News

News Distributors, said, "We make most of our buys as far as history goes, and that doesn't always work, believe me. A person can have a book out one month and a year later have a book that doesn't even do half as well. It's more or less a guessing game, to tell you the truth. I buy what I think is necessary to make sure I have enough product and I'm not going to run out. You certainly don't want to have a 100% sale, because then you're missing something."

Steve Linville has a distribution level for every category. "For every bestseller from 1-20, we have a distribution set up that tells us how many copies are needed just to get it out in the field. But then we also look back at past history of authors, titles, and combine that to make sure we have enough to cover any reorders. We want to maintain the same kind of focus and emphasis that Adams has traditionally had of growing authors through the categories. So if we see an author selling well at a certain distribution level, we move them up to the next, and maybe make them into the next best seller."

Cover got a mixed review. Don Duncan said, "Covers are nice, but I personally don't like to buy just because the cover looks good. It doesn't necessarily mean the book's gonna sell."

Jerry Sanders disagrees. "You've got to have an attractive cover. First and foremost, you've got to get that book in the consumer's hands. Once you've done that, they'll turn it over and read the synopsis on the back. Then they'll either purchase it, think about it and buy it the next time they're in the store, or put it back. Those are your three options."

It was generally agreed that publisher support was important for a new author. "Absolutely," said Sanders of

ETD Kromar. "You gotta have advertising, otherwise it's just another book on the shelves." Linville agrees. "Sometimes there are special titles a publisher really feels strongly about and they are willing to make it a book that will be free on returns, so where we would have ordered 2000, we order 4000, or where it might not have made a bestseller list, if they feel that strongly about it and there's input from others who reviewed the book to back up the publisher's claim, we would maybe order more and treat it as a bestseller."


"Obviously you have to know your reps," Duncan of FEC said. "Some come in here and try to sell me anything. Others will be honest and say I really think this book's going to do very well—you might want to think about ordering this. I use my judgment on what's going to work well, and sometimes I'm wrong and sometimes I'm right. It's a tough job because it's a crapshoot. You're taking a chance on something being big and if it's not, then you've lost. Then other times there might be something you didn't think was going to do that well and all of a sudden it's flying off the shelf. When *Primary Colors* first came out the buyer before me didn't think it would be that big of a book and I didn't think so either. Then come to find out it was a phenomenal seller."

If you're still hoping to see the backlist someday disappear, get over it; it's here to stay.

"Backlist is 25% of our shelf space and I really control that," Jerry Sanders said. "Because they are a proven seller, we rotate the sales all the time, so you're not bringing in the same title every six months. It's usually 18 months before you'll see that title rotate again. We carry 15 of the bestselling backlist authors at any time on our shelves and we update that every three months with new titles, if they're really selling through, or replace them with another author."

Asked what kind of a sell-through is necessary before an author will be moved up to the next level, answers varied. Don Duncan said, "If I was going to increase an order

size it'd have to be somewhere around 80%. We really try to get a 65 to 70% sale out of a book." Jerry Sanders, on the other hand, says, "They have to achieve a 45%




If you're still hoping to see the backlist someday disappear, get over it....

sell-through for two novels in the same genre before we escalate to the next level, which isn't really hard to do. We have other books, such as the bestsellers, that really pull us through to get us to a 53% sell. Our backlist is 80 to 90% sell-through." Steve Linville looks at sales. "If sale

percentages are going up and the last book sold through at 55%, I'll move them up to the next level."

When it comes to local author support, most wholesalers agree that stickers are effective. Except for one buyer in the Denver area who admitted she'll only order the top titles and maybe a few farther down the list, with no specialty ordering to accommodate local authors or readers, the IDs seem to bend over backward to support their local writers. Steve Linville said "local" is becoming more relative as his territory has expanded so much, but they still sticker the books and encourage authors to come



**"Our backlist is
80-90% sell-
through."**

Jerry Sanders, ETD Kromar

to the warehouse to sign the stock. Don Duncan said they try to localize. "If an author lives down in Ft. Lauderdale," he said, "we try

and push her books more in that area." ETD Kromar has a 30-pocket area set aside that is labeled local author, local being about a 60-mile radius. They use an outfit called Buy Pack Pick, which notifies the wholesaler when an author in the area has a new book out and who supplies the stickers. ETD Kromar also has local authors stop by to sign stock and put stickers on before they leave the warehouse. Sanders has found readers to be loyal to local authors. "They know when the books are coming out, too."

When asked about trends, westerns seem to be dying out in Don Duncan's area in Florida and are not strong in other metropolitan areas, but they are still doing well in rural America. "Once you get about 50-60 miles away from Dallas, we do sell a lot more westerns...and romances too," the ETD Kromar buyer said. "In a division of our company in Tyler, which is about 90 miles east of Dallas, westerns and romances make up almost 60% of their inventory in the supermarkets." Linville, in Seattle, agrees. "Our territory has expanded to include a lot more rural areas and we've actually started to order more westerns than we used to," he said.

The good news for all of us, writers and distributors alike, is that young adult books are on the rise. "Goosebumps are extremely popular here and I order a lot of them," said the FEC News buyer. "And it seems like your *Babysitters' Club* and some of the *Nancy Drews* seem to be picking up quite a bit."

Don Duncan said it best when he added, "You start 'em out young and they'll read for the rest of their lives, I hope. That's what keeps us in business." **NINC**

Susan Andersen is the author of five romantic suspense novels. Her sixth, *Disreputable*, is an Avon release scheduled for April of '98.

NINC Members Honored

Novelists, Inc. members took home a pile of awards at the 14th Annual *Romantic Times* Booklovers Convention in Baton Rouge early in November.

Career Achievement awards went to NINC members Kathryn Lynn Davis, Historical Novel; Jill Barnett, Historical Love and Laughter; Roberta Gelis, Historical Fantasy; Patricia Potter, Western Historical Romance; Kasey Michaels, Regency Historical Romance; Nan Ryan, Historical Storyteller of the Year; Debra Dixon, Innovative Series Romance; B.J. James, Series Storyteller of the Year; Linda Barlow, Contemporary Novel; Stella Cameron, Contemporary Romantic Suspense; and Janice Davis Smith (Justine Davis), Futuristic Romance.

Reviewers Choice awards given to NINC members included:

Series Romance winners Maggie Osborne (Margaret St. George), Muriel Jensen, Rhonda Harding-Pollero (Kelsey Roberts), JoAnn Ross, B.J. James, Myrna Temte, Ronn and Janice Kaiser (Janice Kaiser), and Donna Gimarc (Elisabeth Fairchild);

Mainstream and New Reality Romance winners Jayne Ann Krentz, Diane Chamberlain, Tami Hoag and Janice Davis Smith (Justine Davis);

Historical Romance winners Julie Garwood, Mary L. Lechleidner (Delia Parr), Teresa Medeiros, Penelope Williamson, Emily Krokosz (Emily Carmichael), Jo Beverly, Loretta Chekani (Loretta Chase), and Bertrice Small.

Also honored at the convention were *Bookrak Mail-Order Catalog's* Top Selling Authors for 1996. NINC members on that list included (Super Release Romance) Catherine Coulter, Mary Jo Putney and Betina Krahn; (Historical Romance) Anna Lee Baier (Ana Leigh), Christina Dodd, Sharon Ihle, Colleen Faulkner and Joan Johnston; (Contemporary Romance) Pamela Wallace and Stephanie Mittman; and (Series Romance) Nora Roberts, Maggie Osborne (Margaret St. George) and Carol S. Backus (Suzanne Barclay).

NINC members who took home awards given by the Bookstores That Care network included Julie Garwood, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Nora Roberts, Linda Howington (Linda Howard), Sandra Kitt and Marilyn Campbell.

(Ed. Note: If you received an award at the RT Convention and were not listed above, please notify me and I'll correct the error in the next issue. I may have missed some new members not yet listed on the roster or a pseudonym I didn't connect with a member's name. VLT)

Covering the Conference: *The Best of Baltimore*

This year introduces a new format for profiling the conference in the pages of NINK. Instead of asking overworked moderators to summarize discussion groups, NINK assigned the job to four intrepid reporters. Laura Resnick and Judy Myers each took a third of the events; Mary Kilchenstein and Binnie Syril Braunstein split the last third. Here, presented in their own unique voices, are their reports.

Operating under deadline pressures in the wilderness of Vermont, Cara Neggers nonetheless planned an excellent variety of programming for this year's Novelists, Inc. conference, which she and the moderators executed with grace, efficiency and good humor.

The **Mystery and Suspense** Authors Discussion Group revealed that the mystery genre is heavily dominated by series mysteries, making it increasingly difficult to sell a non-series mystery (with the exception of one or two new-author "blockbuster" releases cited). A new series needs a "great gimmick" to enter this tight marketplace. The disadvantages of generally low print-runs in midlist mystery are countered by a long shelf life. Due to many specialty stores hand-selling this genre, it has not been losing its midlist slots.

Jayne Krentz opened the **Category to Lead Title** discussion with a comment that I found lucid, useful and worth repeating here: "As long as the relationship is the focus of the book, you are still writing a romance, however big the book, whatever other elements are included. And since romance is the biggest market, it's a good one to write for." The most relevant comments in this discussion, I thought, were those which stressed individual vision and commitment, rather than chasing market trends or seeking permission (or stroking) from publishing professionals.

An **Ounce of Prevention** opened discussion of stresses that professional authors routinely encounter and endure, and various ways that individuals deal with and recover from them. At the nuts-and-bolts end of the spectrum, **The Way Things Work** was largely a Q&A format where phrases like "reconciliation to print" and "trim size" were flung around and defined by publishing professionals.

Publishing at the Turn of the Millennium was both fascinating and overwhelming to someone as

computer-impaired as I am. The primary theme of this workshop was frequently repeated throughout the remainder of the publisher-attended sessions: publishing will experience major changes over the next few years, not only due to technology, but also due to the consolidation of the distributors. Both factors should enable publishing to develop heretofore impossible standards of efficiency in production, distribution and marketing...but not just yet. The downside of these trends is (and will be) the increasingly risk-averse, "brand-name product," bottom-line mentality dominating the marketplace. This workshop and the **Promotion, Marketing and Publicity** workshop after it made it clear (to my eternal sorrow) that computers will play an increasingly important role in the future of publishing. While some traditional methods of publisher promotion were cited as still being effective, dozens of new Internet possibilities and strategies were discussed.

In terms of authors' personal promotional efforts, publishers urged communication and cooperative efforts between publisher and writer to develop and execute effective plans. I thought one of the most useful strategies suggested was that of exploring realistic, manageable goals, such as increasing your next book's sales by (for example) 10,000 copies, or by 5% and so on.

The conference wrapped up with the traditional banquet (I'd give the food a C+) and an enjoyable speech by Ken Atchity which pretty much reaffirmed to me that no one who wants a safe life or steady paycheck should be writing (and that most people who believe they have safety and security are deluding themselves).

Finally...right around the time the ceiling of my hotel room buckled, and it started raining cats and dogs on my bed, I wondered how anyone had had the gall to complain about the hotel I'd helped select for last year's conference.

— **Laura Resnick**



Having missed last year's NINC conference due to "circumstances beyond my control," I was doubly eager to travel to Baltimore and sip from the cup of collective wisdom. Here's a sampling of this year's vintage...

As NINC members who attended **The Writing Life** well know, writing isn't a career where hard work equals

an annual review and a possible promotion. (Not that “real world” jobs are that secure, any more!) As writers, we lose control of a project once it’s finished, so we should protect the work in progress and respect it for its potential to heal and offer a legitimate escape to the beleaguered reader with two jobs, kids and a sick parent.

Not every book will fit the hot trends of the moment, but Joan Wolf spoke feelingly on behalf of “sincerity of feeling and human emotion” as vital traits. We want to write the book that’s in our hearts, but what about the mortgage payment, when you aren’t the flavor of the month/year/decade? Literary tastes are cyclical and your forte may come back into favor; in the meantime, however, many agreed they’d do what they had to do to “stay in the game.” As Kristine Rolofson pointed out, “There’s always the hope that the next project may be the one.” And Colleen Faulkner reminded us all that it’s a continuum: “Your life’s a work-in-progress, too. Don’t burn out.”

In **Writing for Multiple Houses or Lines**, moderator Stella Cameron described the leverage that can accrue when you are successfully published by more than one house at a time, and advised writers to be sure the houses were aware of each other. “Drop the other publisher’s name with them regularly,” she urged, with a twinkle in her eye.

Strong agent support and the willingness to pull (repurchase) a manuscript are important factors, as well as a Payback Out of First Proceeds clause in your contract. It’s also wise to coordinate release dates of your works at both houses, for the benefit of you *and* both your houses.

At **Historicals: Mid-List to Mainstream**, moderator Catherine Coulter opened with the facts: the historical market is shrinking, and the number of mid-list titles has been cut roughly in half. But why? Have we, perhaps, bored our readers?

A lively debate ensued. Some blamed “plot-light” books and urged the need to beef up the plots and make them more sophisticated. Others pointed a finger at publishers who insist on an ever narrower range of acceptable settings and time periods. One writer reported hearing a reader wail, “Where’s Roberta Gellis? We want bigger books!” But Mary Jo Putney countered by pointing out that light, short books have done well, so that’s what the houses are buying. Meanwhile, others reported that their editors have been cutting word count back from 120,000 to 100,000.

Jayne Ann Krentz observed that big historicals and women’s suspense were both hot genres in the 1960s. Women’s suspense has now made a comeback; might big historicals be “due” for a revival, as well? Cheryl Zach’s wish list was for more history and less romance, but Ann Maxwell cautioned that a “General Fiction” label can be a kiss of death, and urged keeping enough emphasis on the love story to keep “Romance” printed on the spine.

In closing, Catherine Coulter urged writers not to abandon the “edge” in their books, while Mary Jo Putney cautioned that it may be necessary to weave that startling element in as a subplot.

When Leslie Wainger, Carrie Feron and Damaris Rowland (**Developing A Writing Career**) were asked what to do when your book is published to “a great silence,” the need to build from book to book was emphasized, as was the need for creative promotion. But when one author asked “Which books get a boost from the publisher, and why?” the answer was that they look for “A great book and good numbers.” And those numbers are ever harder to achieve. As Carrie Feron stated, “Say that Store A ordered 10 copies of your last book and sold 8. This time, they want to play it safe and only order 8.” She also pointed out that this is a mature market, with a lot of “product” out there. Damaris Rowland spoke to the importance of editorial passion and the power of an in-house campaign, but all acknowledged this happens only rarely. Most writers are called upon to adopt Carrie Feron’s view: “The *New York Times* list isn’t necessary to a good career. Not everybody can fit at the top of the pyramid. It’s great just to get published. Thousands don’t.”

The essential elements in **The Author-Editor-Agent Relationship**, all agreed, are communication and teamwork. Tara Gavin also stressed mutual respect and the need “to remove unproductive emotion from the creative process.” All parties will share in the resultant success, even if each didn’t “win” on every point. As Eileen Fallon pointed out, “This is a business of emotions and strong personalities.” “Author/agent is a ‘significant other’ relationship, like a marriage,” in Linda Hayes’s view. Nevertheless, an agent represents many authors, and it is often the agent and the editor who have worked together on more joint projects. Keeping the balance right and the communications accurate is the true challenge.

Making a Good Book Better was, in some ways, a study in contrasts, particularly where editors Carolyn Marino and Kate Duffy were concerned. When moderator Vicki Lewis Thompson asked the two how they would respond to the receipt of a manuscript that was excellent in parts but clearly had problems, Marino responded, “If I fall in love with it, I’ll take it, even if it needs work.” But Duffy shook her head. “Honestly? In today’s market, I’d reject a good book that needed to be rewritten.”

In addition to “high maintenance” manuscripts, Duffy warned of the author who wants to write something so different from their previous work that it will force a switch to an unrelated section of the bookstore. “After all their previous work building this person, the sales force wants to slit their wrists.” She advises going to a new house when you write in a new genre. (Is this you? Go back and reread the previous section on **Writing for Multiple Houses**!) “And,” she adds, “take a new >>>

The Best of Baltimore

(Continued from page 9)

name if you think your new genre will repel your old readers."

Duffy admits to worrying when an author raves *too* strongly about her "incredible" work in progress. "Or claim they wrote it in half the usual time," Marino seconds. Says Duffy, "It's a signal to pick my words carefully, because there's a *lot* of emotional investment."

Generally speaking, however, they feel that the way to make a good book better is to be insightful, injecting more of whatever element makes the book what it is: more suspense in a mystery, more lyricism in a literary novel, etc. Agent Marianne Colas likens it to a physician's responsibility: "First, do no harm." As Kate Duffy admits, "On my tombstone, I want them to be able to inscribe: *She never made a book worse.*"

Ken Atchity is a force of nature. Rarely have I encountered someone who managed to be both mercilessly insightful about our crazy business and yet genuinely upbeat and inspiring. At his session on **Managing And Prioritizing Your Time and Career**, he quoted Herman Melville: "To write a mighty book, you must have a mighty theme," and encouraged us to learn to better understand and manage ourselves, as well as our time.

In describing each of us as a triumvirate of **The Visionary, the Accountant** and that eternal referee between them, **The Managing Editor**, he stressed the essential skill of learning to identify which of those voices is prompting us to take (or avoid) any given action in our writing life. And for those of us who instinctively resist the traditional, structured wisdom of writing at the same time every day, he suggested setting a goal of total time spent on a given project per week and then using a stopwatch to track how much time we actually put in, regardless of what hour of the day or night that work occurs. As creative people, we should tackle our roadblocks creatively, especially those which are self-created.

To quote a Cajun saying used by Mr. Atchity in his Saturday night banquet speech, "If you ain't scared, you ain't doin' anything serious."

So now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll go write something mighty.

— Judy Myers



Making the Bestsellers Lists: Making the *New York Times* bestsellers list is neither an accident nor luck. It requires the deliberate effort of author, agent and, most

especially, publisher. Hitting the NYT is a combination of packaging, cover concept, print runs and sell-through. Can an author have any control over the process? Perhaps. She can—and may have to—produce two or more books a year, suggest cover concepts and try to motivate her publisher, through her agent, to take the necessary steps to put her on the list. But the author's hard work will be for naught if the publisher isn't willing to do its part, in which case, the author may need to change houses.

Mainstream Popular Fiction (MPF): What is it? Nobody in this session, including adept moderator Diane Chamberlain, claimed to have the answer—although many had opinions. Is MPF defined by writing or marketing? Does a category book become MPF when released with a new cover and "fiction" on its spine? Some thought so. However, the suggestion was made that genre fiction can be defined by reader expectation; each genre has its own set of expectations, but genre books that satisfy a cross-genre audience are what constitute MPF. While no conclusion was reached, discussion was lively, and all were given food for thought and, perhaps, a different perspective.

Popular Fiction and Hollywood: Yes, there is hope in Hollywood for the enterprising author. Kenneth Atchity offered an alternative to the gloomy market picture and gave the following tips: Think "high concept." Think strong male lead (ticket sales being driven by women, who want to see Cruise and Gibson). Think romantic comedy and thriller (action, science fiction). Think "seven most important scenes" (a two-page, or less, description of these are what studios want to see).

Atchity prefers authors to submit ideas, in the form of treatments, before any book or screenplay is written. On the other hand, novels that have "aged"—i.e., were published years ago—are in demand. An author shouldn't expect creative control on a first sale of movie rights, but may be able to negotiate this on subsequent sales. There's money to be made by an author with the right kind of ideas, a flexible mind and the willingness to take creative risks.

Bestsellerization of Genre Fiction: Discussion began with opinions from the editors and agent present on how genre authors hit the list. Advice ranged from being patient ("there's no such thing as an overnight success") to being careful what you wish for (lest you force your publisher to push you before you're ready to handle the consequences). The session quickly mutated, however, into a discussion of the current state of the mar-

ket—which might have been more aptly titled “The Depressing Facts of Life.”

If the experts (Nita Taublib, Claire Zion, Hillary Ross and Karen Solem) are to be believed, the market isn’t simply “tight”; it appears to be facing extinction. The merging of wholesalers is dramatically affecting *all* publishers’ distribution and, consequently, sales. Smaller houses with low overhead are trying to solve the problem with book clubs and online sales. Larger houses are offering distributors discounts on standing orders. But the reality is that books are now competing with many other forms of more accessible and cheaper entertainment, and the result will be a permanent downsizing of the publishing industry, or a re-invention of the way publishing works—and maybe both. Count on it.

— *Mary I. Kilchenstein*



Stephen Hunter’s Luncheon Speech: Mr. Hunter’s talk focused on how lucky we writers are to be making our living telling stories. Throughout history, information has been presented in a narrative package, first as a way of inscribing facts in memory, then as a way of provoking pleasure centers. Narrative “herbs” are also medicinal, as the process of reading, losing oneself in narration, provides escape from anxieties, bitterness and the pressures of life. Where else but in a book can you have a vacation for \$23.95? And then there’s the magic—the capacity to mesmerize the reader.

Fighting Techniques for Action Sequences: On Friday afternoon, a room full of observers watched Laura Resnick get tossed around on green and white gym mats in a hands-on display of Indonesian-style armed and unarmed combat. After almost every individual pattern (choke hold, neck break, “slash” or “puncture”), Laura ended up on the mat. Then someone usually piped up, “Do it again!” Which Laura and her mentor, Jerry Spradlin cheerfully did.

NINC members asked about fight sequences in real life as opposed to television or movies, queried the experts on how hand-to-hand combat could work within a particular book, and some even volunteered to have their love handles pinched. (Another combat move.) Throughout the afternoon, Jerry spoke of martial arts as an alternative to concealed weapons, of the need to make peace without being aggressive, and about the difference between Western fighting vs. Eastern fighting: in Eastern fighting, there’s no wasted motion. He ended the afternoon by advising his audience: “Never fight unless you must; if you must—enjoy it!”

“Reinventing” a Writing Career: Judy Cuevas moderated a lively panel that included agent Steven Axelrod and editors Ellen Edwards (Avon) and Birgit Davis-Todd (Harlequin). The panel focused on writing the bigger book vs. staying in category. Consensus was that these choices are a matter of comfort level, category being a safety net that the writer might jettison once a mainstream career is established. The decision to write a bigger book should come from the writer, rather than an agent or editor. If an editor advises writing a bigger book, warning signals should go off. A bigger book doesn’t require radical changes in writing style; plots, characters and romantic relationships can be made more complex without the author losing her established category audience.

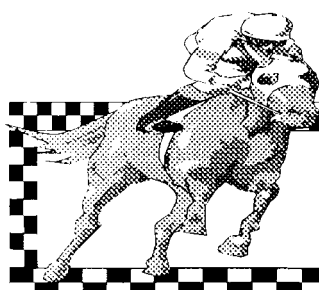
When an author wants to move up from category, the first step should be market research. “Read a genre to see if you fit in,” one editor advised. If the author chooses a genre in which s/he has no track record, panel members agreed, “Push the new ‘you’ with a completed manuscript in hand,” the completed manuscript being a critical element of the “reinvention” process.

— *Binnie Syril Braunstein*

Remembering

Susannah Davis died of cancer on November 1. For those who knew her, it was a great shock to lose such a dynamic person who always faced every challenge in her life head on. She was one of those multi-talented writers who could write both evocative, richly textured historical romances as well as fast-paced, emotional contemporary romances.

Susannah came to romance writing from the rich talent pool in the Shreveport LA area, and was a driving force in NOLA (RWA Chapter). Her books appeared with regularity on the nomination lists from RWA and RT. She enjoyed meeting other writers and readers as much as she was devoted to her craft. Those who met her personally felt they had glimpsed a little of the Southern Lady mystic wrapped in a gregarious whirlwind. She will be missed by her friends and family. The family has requested donation be made to St. Jude’s Hospital in Memphis TN in Susannah’s name.



The Fast Track

NINC Members on the USA Today List

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 **Marilyn Pappano*** a postcard alerting her to upcoming books, especially those in multi-author anthologies, which are often listed by last names only. Alternately, Marilyn's phone/fax number is 918-227-1608, fax 918-227-1601 or online: **pappanor@gorilla.net**. 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!

* Marilyn Pappano has taken over *The Fast Track* from Carole Nelson Douglas.

Member	Title	Oct 6	Oct 13	Oct 20	Oct 27
Mary Balogh, Edith Layton, Patricia Rice, et al.	<i>A Regency Christmas Feast</i>			182n	127
Jennifer Blake, et al.	<i>A Joyous Season (anth.)</i>			185n	130
Dixie Browning	<i>Stryker's Wife</i>				132n
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Heir</i>	74	150		
Diane Mott Davidson	<i>Killer Pancake</i>	126	140		
Jude Deveraux	<i>Legend</i>	97	132		
Linda Howard, Debbie Macomber, et al.	<i>Christmas Kisses (anth.)</i>			194n	26
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Witchcraft</i>	189n	47	63	99
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Winter Fire</i>			101n	
Debbie Macomber, et al.	<i>Home for Christmas (anth.)</i>		141n		
Judith McNaught, Jude Deveraux, Andrea Kane, et al.	<i>A Gift of Love (anth.)</i>		70n	60	75
Teresa Medeiros	<i>Shadows and Lace</i>	39n	33	73	120
Linda Lael Miller	<i>Tonight and Always</i>		103n	65	85
Marilyn Pappano	<i>Discovered: Daddy</i>				93n
Mary Jo Putney	<i>River of Fire</i>			66n	41
Karen Robards	<i>Hunter's Moon</i>	87			
Nora Roberts	<i>From the Heart</i>	43n	21	31	61
Nora Roberts	<i>Megan's Mate</i>			263n	42
Joan Wolf	<i>The Deception</i>	242n	80	149	

STRETCHED On the Self-Promotion Rack

The following appeared on NINC's online maillist earlier in the year. At the time, several members suggested running it in NINK, but space constraints kept it from appearing until now. To subscribe to the maillist, see instructions in the Online column on page 16.

When I first got published, I thought like all newbies that the publisher would actually promote the book. Okay, stop laughing. I soon learned this was a pipedream. I began putting together some ideas of what I could do myself. First, I rented the entire mailing list of the Southeastern Bookseller's Association, wrote a really nice form-yet-personal letter, and did a mail merge of some 450 names; what amounted to a personal letter to every bookseller in the southeast. My publisher reimbursed me for the cost of the mailing list (a gesture I've since learned was quite magnanimous), but I had to pay the postage and commit the time and hassle myself.

I got three replies to my letter and one invitation to a signing at a bookstore in Florida. I couldn't put together enough signings to justify the trip, so never made it. All in all, it was probably wasted time and money.

Then I joined our colleague organization, Sisters in Crime, and a couple of other writers took me under their collective wings. I also read their chapbook "Shameless Promotion for Brazen Hussies," which is a fine primer on the not-so-subtle art of Self-Promotion. I began putting together my own signings, tracking down conferences and going to them, putting together panels for conferences, book fairs, anything I could get. I spoke at every opportunity, honorarium or not, and gave more dinner speeches, spoke to more students, served on more committees, gave more interviews, than I ever thought possible. I've also blurbed other books, done interviews with other writers, written articles, participated in Internet discussion groups, created a website that's turning into a monster; in short, anything to get my name (and more important, my books) before the public.

The zenith of this was late 1994 through all of 1995, when I attended a book fair, mystery conference, writers workshop, speaking opportunity, whatever, on average ev-

ery five weeks all freaking year long. During that year, I traveled as far west as Seattle and as far east as Nottingham, England; as far south as Alabama, as far north as the Michigan-Canada border, almost all of it at my own expense. A conservative estimate of my outlay would be \$10-15,000 in travel expenses, not to mention lost time and energy, and the psychic cost of doing things like attending a mystery conference where 450 people show up and 150 of them are other authors all clamoring for attention.

I think the past couple of years qualifies me as being at least knowledgeable about the cost-benefit ratio of extensive self-promotion. And the conclusion I've come to is, candidly, it ain't worth it. I've made some good friends, had a few good times, etc. But I've recently received an offer from my publisher on my next two books, and I can tell you unequivocally that all of my efforts meant squat to the publisher. The self-promotion did not translate into a readership. On the surface, I would expect the problem to be the quality of my books, but I have an Edgar Award, a Shamus nomination and a *New York Times* Notable Book (see, dammit, there's that self-promotion virus at work yet again....), as well as a file folder full of good to great reviews.

And, as I mentioned earlier, there is a psychic cost to driving 300 miles to a booksigning where you sell three books and then have to drive back home in the same day. There is a very high cost to attending a conference in a hotel full of other authors all begging for attention, being "on" constantly, like a nest full of baby birds all hoping they get the worm. Schmoozing is very destructive to the spirit when it's carried too far. Carolyn Hart once told me that she now writes only about one-third of her working time. The other two-thirds is spent promoting her career and conducting the business of writing.

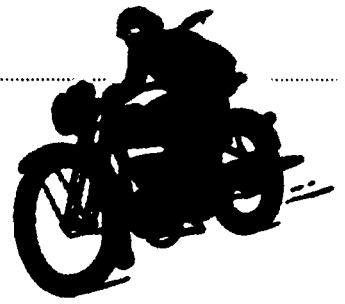
Maybe that's what it takes, but I confess to being completely burned out and depressed by the whole experience of the last couple of years. So I empathize completely with my NINC colleague who said she gave up self-promotion ten years ago. I've cut back drastically. I've attended one mystery conference this year—Bouchercon, the big one—and I went to New York for Edgars week only because I'm an MWA regional VP and had to go. As for the rest of it, if my publisher wants me to do anything to promote my work, they can put it together and they can pay for it. I've done my part, paid as many dues as I care to.

Maybe that's a mistake in this market-driven, celebrity-obsessed culture and business environment of today. Candidly, I feel that when Random House is stupid enough to give Joan Collins a four-million advance and to let Swiftly Lazar cross out the acceptable manuscript clause of her contract, then there's not much room left for people who just want to write well anyway....

— **Steven Womack**

DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

Qualitative Analysis and Other Sorcery of the Modern Age



Long ago, in prehistoric times, one caveman (sorry—caveperson) never said to another: “And what do you do for a living?” (I’m sure of this because I’ve read Leakey. I’ve even been to the Olduvai Gorge and asked, so don’t think you can challenge me on this in Letters-to-the-Editor next month.)

Ergo, no caveperson was ever called upon to answer: “Well, I’m a Neolithic artist. My work is primarily in caves, but you *might* have seen some of it on a cliffside last year, although that’s not really my favorite venue. I’ve had some trouble finding my niche in the marketplace, because I’m not easily ‘pegged.’”

Some days I envy our Stone Age ancestors. It’s not that I mind being asked what I do for a living, it’s just that I’ve never found a good answer for all the questions that follow. No one is ever satisfied with the simple answer: “I’m a writer.” Not even other writers. Everyone wants to know what *kind* of writing I do.

Admittedly, it used to be relatively uncomplicated in those golden, halcyon days when I simply said, “I write romance novels.”

Yes, of course, there *were* the all-too-frequent responses which made my grind my teeth together: did I *really* write that “trash”; why didn’t I *look* like a romance writer; did I research my sex scenes *personally*; and surely I didn’t take my work seriously, did I? I fumed about the condescension without ever appreciating the fact that, no matter how skewed the view, at least everyone knew what a romance novel was.

After my career diversified, as have so many of our careers in NINC, I tried to be specific when answering the “what *kind* of writing? questions. I mean, everyone around me wasn’t just saying, “I’m a teacher,” “I’m a sci-

tist,” or “I’m a waitress.” No indeed! This is the modern age, and everyone has a qualitative definition of their profession now. Everywhere I go nowadays, people say, “I’m a speech and communications teacher, but I also do some instruction in 18th-Century European literature and have a background in drama,” “I’m a biochemical engineer with a specialty in neuron transplant analysis,” or “I’m a senior level server in a nouveau California-Nepalese vegetarian restaurant.”

Naturally I wanted to keep pace with the times. So I started saying, “I write romance, fantasy and a little science fiction.”

This produced blank stares and dismissive nods. I finally started to realize that in naming so many fields I probably sounded like I had tried all these genres one by one, and been forced to keep moving on due to complete failure in each one. So I shortened the answer.

“I write romance and science fiction/fantasy.”

This answer produced two undesirable effects. Either I’d get long lectures on science, which I understand about as well as I understand the federal budget; or someone would choose the easy route and ask, “What *kind* of romance?”

So I shortened my answer again: “Romance and fantasy.”

Big mistake. You can probably see it coming.

“But romances *are* fantasies, aren’t they?” Or better yet, “What—this means you put your fantasies about romance down on paper and someone *pays* you for this? Can I get a job like that?”

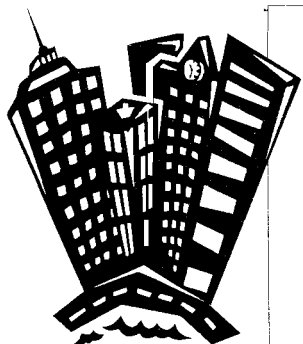
Then I signed a contract for two very long fantasy novels, meaning I won’t be writing another romance novel for a while. I suddenly found myself in a position to put qualitative analysis behind me and

answer the “what *kind* of writing” question as simply and concisely as I used to: “I’m a fantasy writer.”

The typical response: “What does *that* mean?”

I falter. “Well...it means I write fantasy novels.”

A slow, uncomprehending nod; a mixed signal meaning, *I don’t really know what the hell*



Evan’s Excellent Vacation

Our kindly curmudgeon, Evan Maxwell, has agreed to continue writing *East of the Hudson* for another year, which is a lovely holiday present to us all. But to prove that Scrooge doesn’t run *NINK*, we’ve given him December off. *East of the Hudson* will return in 1997.

you're talking about. Then: "What is a fantasy novel, Laura?"

Guess what? Everyone I meet (is it just *me*?) who isn't either in publishing or already a fantasy reader...doesn't even have a *skewed* view of fantasy. They don't know what it is.

I usually try an easy ploy. "You've heard of Tolkien, right? He was a fantasy writer."

"Oh." A pause. "So you're going to write about Hobbits?"

"NO!" I calm myself. "No. I just mean, it's the same genre."

"Oh." Another pause. "But what *is* the genre?"

I stumble. "Uh, well...You know...Stories with fantastical elements or premises."

"Uh-huh...Like *what*?"

"Gosh, um...Things that are mythical, magical, otherworldly, alternate realities, imaginary —"

"Well, what's *your* book about?"

I see bewilderment and a dawning impatience, and I can't think of a handy two-line blurb for the 1,000-page novel in progress. "Buy the book," I finally say.

"Well, Laura, I would, but....I don't really have much time for reading. Haven't bought a book all year."

At moments like that, I long for those simple Stone Age days...when you could club someone over the head without fear of a civil rights suit.

— **Laura Resnick**

Author of 13 romance novels, including Fever Dreams (DLP/Zebra, Jan/97), Laura has recently completed In Legend Born, the first book of a fantasy trilogy which will be released in hardcover by Tor Books. If you want to know what it's about, then you can damn well buy a copy and read it.



NINK Notes

Smashing Sites

On behalf of the Site Committee, I am very pleased to announce that the Board has chosen New York City and Lake Tahoe NV as the sites for NINC's 1997 and 1998 conferences. We look forward to great success in both NYC and Tahoe, taking full advantage of the unique character of these beautiful locations. The lovely Marriott East Side, which began life as a prestigious men's club, offers an excellent Midtown location for next year's conference. For 1998, we've selected the Hyatt Regency on the north shore of Lake Tahoe—a gorgeous site with its own private beach, a small casino and spectacular views. You won't want to miss either of them—they promise to be terrific!

— **Julie Kistler, Site Committee Chair, 1997 & 1998**

Homepages are Hot Deal

Want to sell more copies of your books? Want to let readers know what's coming out? Want to do it all dirt cheap? Look no further. NINC is now offering "HomePages for the HomePageLess" at our terrific Internet site: **http://www.ninc.com** and you don't even have to be hooked up to the Internet to take advantage of this offer. For details, contact:

Patricia Maxwell, NINC HomePage Boss
PO Box 9218, Quitman LA 71268-9218

Tel: (318) 259-2581 (voice)

E-mail: PAMrJB@aol.com

P.S. ... If you already have a homepage, NINC will link to it FREE! Just pop over to **http://www.ninc.com/** and give us the particulars.

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

William Powell Adams (*T.M. Adams*), Mountain View CA
Carol Bruce-Thomas (*Rachel Vincer, Debra Carroll*),
Scarborough, Ont., Canada
Mary Kennedy, Wilmington DE
Barbara Parker, Ft. Lauderdale FL
Stobie Piel, Harpswell ME

New Members

Rita Boucher, Cockeysville MD
Carla Fredd, Stone Mountain GA
Barbara Freethy (*Kristina Logan*), Burlingame CA
Grace Green, West Vancouver BC (Canada)
Laura Hayden (*Laura Kenner*), Burke VA
Karen A. Katz (*Jillian Karr*), West Bloomfield MI
Susan King, Gaithersburg MD
Amy Lanz (*Amy Frazier*), Acworth GA
Sandra Myles (*Sandra Marton*), Storrs CT
Dawn Reno (*Diana Lord*), Deltona FL



As I'm sure you're reading elsewhere in *NINK*, the October conference in Baltimore was wonderful! Among all of the other workshops and discussions summarized in the newsletter, we had a session on **Cyberspace** led by the very knowledgeable Linda Barlow and Eileen Buckholtz. I took notes so that I could share some of the highlights here.

Most of the discussion centered on Internet Service Providers (ISPs). The web site <http://thelist.iworld.com/> provides a list of nearly 4,000 ISPs and their fees and features—definitely a good starting point! The main things to consider when selecting an ISP are: access numbers (preferably local), T1 vs. T3 (no, I don't know exactly what that means, but T3 is better), tech support, number of modems they use (more is better), price, stability (how long they've been in business) and whether they include a home page for the monthly fee.

We also talked about web pages and how to get the most out of them. Things you'll want to do if you have one: publicize it (in your print publicity, promo items, radio appearances, etc.), tell your publisher about it, establish plenty of links to it (remember the NINC site!) and register it with search engines. A super-easy way to do the latter is with "Submit-it" at <http://204.57.42.244/submit.htm> which will automatically register your site with 18 search engines/directories. The various benefits of web sites were discussed, most of which I mentioned in a previous column. A couple of new ones, though, were exposure to foreign markets (some people have heard from their overseas readers this way) and the potential for media attention leading to interview opportunities.

During the workshop, someone asked me how much Ninclink, NINC's listserv, costs. ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!! Apparently, some people assumed that since you "subscribe" to the listserv, you must have to pay. Au contraire! Other than whatever hourly or monthly fee you pay to use e-mail in general, Ninclink is free. Speaking of

which, we're up to 145 members as of this writing, which is a full quarter of NINC's membership!

As always, we've been having some great discussions on Ninclink, many of them generated by the conference. A remark that Carolyn Nichols made in Baltimore sparked a lively debate on whether or not novelists should expect to make a living at their trade. We've tossed around ideas for resuscitating the Regency genre, including getting them into the hands of teenagers, and we've compared various publishers' royalty rates, payment schedules and treatment of authors. Also, two particularly useful sites which I'd like to share here: A great new search engine, Metacrawler, at <http://metacrawler.cs.washington.edu:8080/> and another online bookstore at <http://www.booksite.com>.

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.

Finally, a couple of tidbits of cyber-news. America Online has unveiled a new pricing plan which will go into effect December 1: \$19.95 for unlimited use, including expanded Internet capabilities (the long-awaited version 3.0 for Macintosh is finally out). They're also offering cheaper plans for lighter usage. That news makes even more alarming this item overheard on the radio news: Internet/online service usage is up 42% this year, and phone lines can't handle the increase. Phone companies are going nuts trying to keep up with the demand as lines are overloaded. Yikes! But demand will no doubt lead to new and innovative solutions (though they may cost us down the road).

That's it from cyberspace for this month. Remember to e-mail me at BrendaHB@aol.com with any late-breaking news for this column. See you online!

— **Brenda Hiatt Barber** :)

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