

Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 8, Number 3

March 1997

A Rose by Any Other Name...

Titles. Everyone wants a good one. But what is a good one? And how can you tell?

"A lot is esthetic appeal," says Wendy McCurdy, senior editor at Bantam Books. "Also, that it hasn't been done to death. Something that makes an impression and is memorable. You want it to stick in readers' minds."

"What's really nice," adds McCurdy, "is if you come up with a title that has a little tension in it. Something that makes you think. Sometimes it's opposites. The title *Beloved Enemy* would be a typical example. It makes you stop and think for a minute and also gives you a vague idea of the story."

What else?

"You don't want anything too long," says McCurdy. "And you have to be careful of words that are too complicated. You want simple words. The old Anglo-Saxon words seem to work best. Short, punchy, as opposed to something more complicated or sophisticated, which doesn't work as well. Also, art directors prefer to work with short titles, but we can't always do that."

Mary George, who writes as Elizabeth Thornton for Bantam, likes her editor's way with titles.

"Wendy has a well-thought-out strategy for suiting titles to books and authors," says George. "Take my books for example. [*Dangerous to Kiss*, *Dangerous to Love*, *Dangerous to Hold*] The 'dangerous' clued the reader into thinking that there would be intrigue in the books. The other words

hinted at the romance. And by doing a series of three with similar titles, she tried to make the author instantly recognizable."

Mary's new release, *The Bride's Bodyguard*, is a different kind of title. Why?

"When *Dangerous to Hold* came out, we had an excerpt in the back of the book for Mary's next book, but we didn't have a title," says McCurdy. "All we

had was a proposal and, believe it or not, sometimes it's tough to come up with the title until you have the whole manuscript. In this case, I'm glad I didn't

focus on a title too quickly because we might have ended up with another *Dangerous* title, maybe *Dangerous to Desire* or something, and that would have been a mistake.

"When we'd seen the manuscript, we thought the *Dangerous* titles had run their course. We thought it was time for something really fresh and new."

"These days, when you're building an author, it's always nice to come up with a theme like that, though. I think it's helped Mary a lot, having those *Dangerous* titles."

So why the change to *The Bride's Bodyguard*? If it ain't broke, why fix it?

"Well, what Mary happens to write is a very passionate, suspenseful story with this rocketing pace and usually with a real mystery," McCurdy says. "She writes a very rich story. That's what comes naturally to her. I've noticed this as I've worked with her and now we're trying to express that in the cover, in the title, in the cover copy. In this case, I talked to one of my bosses, Associate Publisher Nita Taublib, about the title and I think I might have said something about 'bodyguard' or 'bride' and Nita said, 'What about *The Bride's Bodyguard*?'"

"I said, 'Isn't that a bit much?' That was my first reaction. But Nita said, 'No, no, I love it!' And that's how it happened. Our eyes lit up and we said, 'Let's do it.' If we get excited—and we're pretty jaded—then we're pretty sure other people will get excited about it, too."

Series romance can be different. Paula Eykelhof, senior editor of Superromance at Harlequin Books in Toronto, Canada, says with series, "You have all these books in competition with each other on the same shelves."

"Obviously, you want a title that catches a reader's attention and is something memorable. At the same time, it's got to reflect the book honestly."

As to different approaches to titling—"to title" seems to be part of the editor's lexicon—Eykelhof gives several examples. She mentions different types (continued on page 4)

Inside:

President's Column	2
Letters to the Editor	3
Erotica in the U.S.	7
All Hands, Hear This ..	8
1997 NY Conference	
Update	10
Internet Research	11
Online	14
East of the Hudson ...	15
Fast Track	16

Novelists, Inc.
FOUNDED IN 1989

Advisory Council

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

† Founder

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

1997 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 Steven Womack
2525 Forest View Drive
Antioch TN 37013-1333
Ph/Fax 615-367-2674
E-mail: dfbloom@aol.com

SECRETARY Candace Schuler
7 Tenby Chase Drive
Voorhees NJ 08043
Ph/Fax 609-753-3484
E-mail: Schuler 776@aol.com

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

NEWSLETTER EDITOR Anne Holmberg
2372 Vintage Dr.
Colorado Springs CO 80920-3834
Ph 719-592-9460
Fax 719-592-9460 *51
E-mail: anneholmberg@juno.com

ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE
Janice Young Brooks
Box 1112
Mission KS 66222-0112
E-mail: cozybooks@aol.com

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 Central Coordinator

Copyright ©1997 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

Easily Discouraged?

A man I've known for many years suddenly decided he wanted to be a writer and asked me to critique his first story. I'm sure he thought, as all first-time writers do, that he had written the world's first perfect manuscript the first time out. Remember that giddy confidence that comes with complete ignorance? I warned him that I'd tell him what he'd done wrong. He said not to worry because I couldn't discourage him. Ha! I thought. Just give me a chance!

His story had all the typical beginner mistakes, and I patiently explained each one to him. After reading my critique, he called to thank me and to admit he'd been humbled by learning the enormity of his ignorance. I haven't heard from him since.

I can't help wondering if I did what he claimed was impossible, namely, discourage him. If so, I count it a good deed. As someone famous once said (I can never remember who), "If anything can keep you from writing, let it." This is, after all, a thankless business that crushes as many as it elevates, where virtue isn't its own reward, and nice guys sometimes don't finish at all. If I can save one person from that torment, I'll have earned some sort of eternal reward.

But what about the rest of us? The ones who really couldn't be discouraged? I don't know about you, but I'm getting ready to enter the next phase of my career, whatever that may be. After a couple abysmal years in publishing and with two college tuitions to pay, I had to get a real job. I thought I'd hate the pantyhose and the 9 to 5 grind, but I was lucky. I found a job I love working for an organization whose goals are more than worthy of my time and energy—and I'm sure I'll get a book out of it.

Am I discouraged? Am I considering giving up writing in favor of a regular paycheck? Well, no. In fact, I'm rejoicing. That paycheck allows me to step back and take a long, hard look at my work and decide what I want to do next instead of feeling pressured to write something—anything!—that I think might sell.

I'm sure I did my old friend a favor by discouraging him from writing, but I'm glad no one ever discouraged me. Maybe they couldn't have, no matter what. Because I'm a writer, no matter what. And probably you are, too.



We're looking for New Members

A copy of our new NINC brochure is bound into this month's issue of *Novelists' Ink*. Please share this brochure with a published friend who isn't a member of NINC, but should be. Our strength lies in the number and combined talents of our members, so...the more, the merrier!

If you know of more than just one person who should belong to NINC, we'd be glad to send them brochures as well. Just send a list of their names and addresses to our Outreach Committee Chair, Pat Kay, at 1523 Ainsdale Dr., Houston TX 77077-3838, or e-mail her at P.KAY@genie.geis.com

— Victoria Thompson

**This Month
from the
President:**

*Are You Easily
Discouraged?*

*Recruiting Tool
Enclosed —
Help Us Put
Brochure to
Work!*

Advocacy Committee On a Roll: Send in those Cards and Letters

So, how do you set up your will to benefit your heirs?

Your agent might be withholding funds on you; what action do you take?

You feel your career is sliding backward; how do you jump start it again?

The Advocacy Committee (myself, Denise Domning, and whoever is interested) was established to help identify areas of professional concern among the membership. This year, we're taking a proactive approach. We're looking for issues like those above or any others that may create snafus in a writer's career. We'll then take these issues to experts (editors, agents, public relations people, lawyers) and ask their opinions on the best course of action. Hopefully, we'll learn several solutions for the same issue. The idea is *education*, friends, so that if someday you find yourself confronted with a problem, you won't feel powerless. Instead, you'll understand you have options—and you'll have the names of professionals you can turn to for more in-depth advice.

We want to develop a list of professional experts in contracts law, copyright law, estate planning, accounting, etc. from across the country. We want on the list people who have been tested, found to be knowledgeable, and whom *you* would recommend to other writers. I'll keep the list with the Advocacy Committee records and NINC members can contact me for names when a concern arises. If the list is really good, I'm sure we can find another way to distribute it.

A side advantage to our question column will be giving you the opportunity to read these people's opinions and get an impression of the people themselves before you find yourself in trouble and are forced to act in crisis mode.

Send the questions you'd like to see answered or the names of experts you're willing to recommend to: Cathy Maxwell, PO Box 1532, Midlothian VA 23112, C.Maxwell6@genie.com, or fax (804) 744-8978.

— **Cathy Maxwell, Committee Chair**

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.

Wanted: Shared Experiences for Upcoming NINK Articles

Fellow Writers: Knowledge is power! If you've encountered either of the following two writing situations, which will be examined in upcoming *NINK* articles, we're asking you to share your experiences now.

1) If a novel has been accepted, and then, at any stage from editor's letter of intent to actual production, was refused or simply not published, we'd like to know how and why, and what you did about it. Why did the editor/publisher say it wasn't published? What do you think the real reason was? And what did you do to either get them to publish it anyway, or get it accepted elsewhere? What happened? (If you don't want your name used, we'll respect your privacy. But let us know how you handled this awkward situation. Please.)

2) Recently *NINK* ran an article on *how* to fire your agent. But an equally important question is *when* to fire your agent. So, folks, please share. Have you felt a little dissatisfied with what your agent is doing, or not doing, for that chunk of earnings? Have you wondered if someone else might do better for you? Have you gone ahead and done something? Or—equally important—did you decide you and your agent are a good fit, and patience is a virtue? We'd like as broad a spread as possible on who scratched that agent itch, and who didn't, and what happened, either way. (Again, anybody who wants their name kept private, we'll do so.)

Since these articles are my responsibility, please send your messages to me: Marj Krueger, MARJK@delphi.com, or, 6208 Shadow Mountain Drive, Austin, TX 78731. The more who respond, the more we can distill a spectrum of experience into these articles.

Thanks very much, folks. And always—

Possible dreams. — **Marj Krueger**

Shared Experiences, Take 2

If you're an author who has been published by or contracted to be published by Royal Fireworks/Trillium Press, Inc., please get in touch...I'm interested in hearing about *your* experiences with the company.

— **Mike Sackett**

P.O. Box 5015

Glen Arm MD 21057

410-561-8262 (office)

410-561-9148 (fax)

A Rose...

(Continued from page 1)

of titles, such as the “rip-off” or “knock-off” titles. *The Water Baby* (Roz Denny Fox) was an example on the 1996 list.

“The title for that book was very consciously done,” says Eykelhof. “It was a deliberate take on Charles Kingsley’s *Water Babies*, the Victorian children’s book. Of course, the baby in Roz’s story was found in the water, so it was an honest title, too. That sense of honesty is very important to me. Rip-off titles can work, but it’s often crudely done, and if the title seems imposed on the book, that can be a mistake.

“Songs are another source for titles. There’s a lot of borrowing from song titles and again, if it’s legitimate, it can work. The song should in some way be relevant, either because it’s referred to in the story or describes the same sort of situation or emotion.”

I asked Eykelhof to analyze why the title of my Superromance last spring, *The Man from Blue River*, was such a good one, as she’d often mentioned. The title was suggested by my 11-year-old son as we drove through the small British Columbia logging town of that name and, hey—we take ‘em where we can get ‘em.

“Well, certainly a lot of people will respond to the resonance of the phrase, the familiarity of it without being over-familiar. Of course, you’d think of *The Man from Snowy River* [the movie set in Australia], but you don’t necessarily consciously think of that. It just sounds familiar somehow. The title very clearly said ‘Western’ without using the usual Western words. It also meant you were locating this man in this place, and that was very important to who he was and what the story was about. I think it worked very well in that sense.”

What about authors? Do they have a good handle on titles?

“Authors are the worst,” McCurdy says flatly. “There are certain people who are not good at it and just because you write well doesn’t mean you’ll be good at it. You have to be sensitive to so many different things in coming up with a good title. Authors generally aren’t geared that way. They’re much more concerned with the story, and with the title being almost literally true to the story.

“It’s sort of an advertising-y thing,” McCurdy adds. “Some people just have a knack for it. They’re the people who are good at coming up with little jingles. It’s a certain kind of commercial poetry is what it is.”

“Choosing titles is difficult,” confesses Eykelhof, “and it’s something we take very, very seriously. We spend a lot of time at it. In our group, if one of us thinks of a title or comes across a new type of title in *Publishers Weekly* or whatever, we write it in a book. When we have a title meeting, it’s helpful sometimes to have people who don’t know the book as well as I do or the editor who is working on it. We go a lot on people’s reactions. You might have a title that you thought at first glance, oh, this may work, but if

you throw it out and the reaction is lukewarm, you just say, oh, forget it.

“Excitement is a good word for what we feel when we get a title that, firstly, we like and, secondly, works for the book. Of course, we would never force a title on the book without discussing it with the author. Sometimes authors have a list of title ideas and sometimes they just have no idea.”

Then there are editors who don’t consult their authors at all.

“My authors send in manuscripts with a number on it,” says Feroze Mohammed, “and I decide on the titles. Once in a while, I’ll go with an author’s idea if he sends one in or if he really wants it, but usually I’m the one who comes up with them.”

Mohammed is senior editor and editorial coordinator of Gold Eagle, the men’s action/adventure imprint, and Worldwide, a mystery reprint program, both owned by Harlequin Books. Mohammed’s writers send him manuscripts at regular intervals for the popular Mack Bolan series originally created decades ago by Don Pendleton and still appearing under his name.

“I have about a dozen authors. A few too many,” Mohammed says with a smile. “Guys come aboard and they say, I know all about this program, and they don’t. A lot of errors creep in. I’ve got to keep a tight rein on these guys.”

There are 36 action/adventure titles each year and Mohammed also approves titles for the futuristic, post-Holocaust, continuing series, *Deathlands*. The mystery titles generally stay the same in reprint as they appeared in hardcover or trade softcover.

“In the area where we work, which is series action/adventure, I actually have quite a lot of fun choosing titles because these books are based, for the most part, on military or paramilitary things. The whole sphere is rich in certain words, so it’s easy enough to choose a term from warfare or weapons or things like this,” says Mohammed. “Sometimes titles lend themselves to the text. Sometimes they’re obvious. And sometimes they’re very difficult, indeed.”

Mohammed gives the example of the recent task he had to come up with titles that correspond with a fresh take on the ongoing adventures of Mack Bolan, who, Mohammed admits, “is getting a little long in the tooth now.” The series invented the sub-genre of men’s action/adventure in the sixties.

“We wanted to revitalize the series, which is basically a vigilante-type series,” says Mohammed, “and we felt that, oh gosh, enough bad guys from the Colombian Cartel or from the Middle East—let’s find some new bad guys. Of course, we have the Russian mafia now, as opposed to the old Cold War KGB types, but where do we find some new villains?”

“Well, right in the United States with the new militia types. However, the danger there, of course, is a lot of these guys read our books so we don’t want to tick these guys off, right? We have to be careful.

“For this trilogy, which is an in-line promotion we do

each year, I have three books about these militia types hiding under the American flag and sedition and all this sort of thing going on, so what do I call these books? Well, I had to relate it to the text. The difficulty for me was that it wasn't just one book, it's three titles I've got to come up with.

"So I thought, well, okay, let's look at the words that are relevant and germane to what's going on here. Of course the first one that came to mind was 'patriot.' And I needed another word to go with that. The first book is the one starting the whole story and setting it up, firing the opening shot, you might say, so the obvious best word that came to me was 'gambit.' This is an opening move in chess. So *Patriot Gambit* is the first book.

"The second book. All of the action is happening in the second book and the essence of what is happening is here and...hmmm, I have to be a little more general. So what do I do? I call it *Hour of Conflict*, which could work for anything, but in this context I thought it was okay.

"So now, in the third book, our hero is going to have to pull out all the stops and put these bad guys down or whatever, so what do I do? The hero comes out of a secret command base in Virginia. I thought of *Call to Arms*. I thought this had a nice ring, a nice cachet."

A little resonance there, maybe with Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*? "That never hurts," agrees Mohammed. "Although I don't know if these guys read Hemingway. But it doesn't matter. We had some series years ago, about 20 set in Viet Nam, and there was one called *Hamlet*. That was what the American soldiers called *les villes*, the little villages there. It had nothing to do with Shakespeare!"

For *Deathlands*, the futuristic series, Mohammed draws upon a different lexicon.

"For *Deathlands*, we came up with a rather cryptic combination of words that to the uninitiated doesn't mean anything," says Mohammed. "If you don't read a lot of science fiction, it won't mean anything, or if you're not familiar with navigational terms, for instance. The title I'm thinking of is *Dektra Chain*, which is something in ancient navigation.

"When I was handling the series, I would look for these unusual names. Then, of course, you can go back to Greek and Roman and Norse mythology or whatever and come up with titles like *Fury's Pilgrim* or whatever. These are simple, high-adventure types of titles."

Does he check with colleagues? Brainstorm? Eykelhof relies on her group of colleagues to some extent, although she also confesses to trying out titles on her 13-year-old daughter. McCurdy talks to colleagues as well as listens to feedback from a friendly neighbor who is a voracious reader.

"No. There's no time," says Mohammed. "They accept whatever I decide. We do the sample cover almost a year in advance of the production run. Sure, there's some time, in terms of retrievability, if I second-guess myself. But it doesn't often happen. I try to make a title and live with it.

I don't worry it to death."

A cursory glance at today's mass market retail rack shows a glut of titles that are simple labels, a trend some believe was started by John Grisham's *The Firm*. According to author William Bernhardt, Grisham originally wanted all his titles to be plain two-word titles and even preferred *The Brief*. His publishers insisted on sticking in "Pelican." Now they seem pretty happy with Grisham's take on titles. His newest out is *The Runaway Jury*, but before that he had *The Chamber* and *The Rainmaker*.

Out there jostling for the buyer's attention are *The Passage* (Peter Blauner), *The Poet* (Michael Connelly), *The Plan* (Stephen J. Cannell), *The Web* (Jonathan Kellerman), *The Master Sniper* (Stephen Hunter), and *The Intruder* (David Poyer).

The trend is not limited to male authors. On the same racks you'll see *The Obsession* (Catherine Cookson) and *The Cousins* (Rona Jaffe). Not so long ago, the racks were filled with one-word titles, particularly in women's fiction. It was a trend begun most notably by Danielle Steel and leaped on by many other authors.

Right now, there seems to be a particular trend in mystery titles that include food or cookery terms: Susan Wittig Albert (*Rueful Death*, *Rosemary Remembered*, *Witch's Bane*); Tamar Myers (*Too Many Crooks Spoil the Broth*, *No Use Dying over Spilled Milk*); Claudia Bishop (*Murder Well-Done*, *A Pinch of Poison*, *A Dash of Death*); Joanne Pence (*Something's Cooking*, *Too Many Cooks*, *Cooking Most Deadly*).

"This whole food-in-the-title thing for mysteries probably got started with the late Virginia Rich," says author Kathy Lynn Emerson, whose sixteenth century mystery, *Face Down in the Marrow-Bone Pie* is available from St. Martin's this spring. "Rich wrote *The Cooking School Murders*, which appeared in 1982. Nancy Pickard finished her last book for her in 1993, *The 27-Ingredient Chili Con Carne Murders*."

"Sure, there are some trends in titles," McCurdy says, "but it's more that somebody comes up with a fresh idea and everyone else gloms onto it and tries to produce a similar effect with other words maybe.

"Ultimately we only trust ourselves; we don't care what anybody else does. If there's a trend that I see in women's commercial fiction, which is mostly what I do, I'd say it's away from the generic titles of the past. I don't think anybody wants another *Passion's Ecstasy*. Bo-o-ring. You can't remember those titles, there's nothing distinctive about them at all. The days of non-distinctive lines of romance are gone.

"So title is one of your big weapons. I spend a lot of time coming up with a title, both in fiction and the nonfiction books I do. A lot of people are very complacent about it, but at Bantam we're very commercially minded and we're not going to waste that opportunity."

While some authors doubtless admit they don't have the "titling" knack, others spend a great deal of time on their titles.

"My titles, which either my husband or I > > >

A Rose...

(Continued from page 5)

come up with, are a deliberate attempt to do two things," says mystery writer Jill Churchill, whose newest title is *Fear of Frying*. "I want to indicate that the series is cozy and kind of smart-alecky and I also want to give a common thread to the series. Sue Grafton, of course, has the best series titles [alphabetical, currently *M for Malice*] and I think that is part of her ongoing success.

"It's getting harder for me to come up with titles that meet most, if not all of my requirements. It has to be a genuinely funny pun on an easily recognizable classic movie or book title. It has to have a 'domestic' word (frying) and an 'ominous' word (fear).

"Obviously, the title also has to have something to do with the plot. *War and Peas*, *Grime and Punishment*, *Silence of the Hams* and *A Farewell to Yarns* all qualify. *From Here to Paternity* is just funny and fits the book. *A Quiche Before Dying* was a poor title because not many people caught on that it was a pun on *A Kiss Before Dying*."

And then there are authors who hardly have to do anything at all, whether they want to or not. Courtroom drama author William Bernhardt has had six "Justice" titles, starting with *Primary Justice* a few years ago and including his recently released hardcover, *Naked Justice*.

"I've tried coming up with a noun to go with it, but Random House doesn't want that," he says. "They just say, give me an adjective. I don't really feel like I'm doing much."

Bernhardt agrees that readers have a hard time remembering the individual stories of his *justice* titles, but doesn't think readers, in general, remember titles anyway.

"They always say, the one with the red car or whatever," he says.

"Even I can't remember which book I'm talking about," confesses Bernhardt's wife, Kirsten, "and I have a stake in it!"

People who think Sue Grafton has the current best gimmick with her alphabet series might not remember the one who started it all back in the '60s, John D. MacDonald. All his Travis McGee, PI, books had a color in the title. There are probably more than 26 colors—at least MacDonald never seemed to run out of titles. Today, you'll see some of those reprints on the racks and the titles are just as catchy as they ever were: *A Tan and Sandy Silence*, *Darker than Amber*, *Nightmare in Pink*, *Bright Orange for the Shroud*. Maybe Janet Evanovich (*One for the Money*, *Two for the Dough*) is onto a continuity gimmick with no limit at all.

Many authors and their publishers use continuity titles to identify a book with an ongoing character. MacDonald's Travis McGee appeared in all his "color" titles; all Bernhardt's "justice" titles feature lawyer Ben Kincaid; Evanovich's "number" titles are identified prominently as

Stephanie Plum books. By identifying certain types of titles with ongoing characters, the author is freed to write the occasional book outside of the constraints of the title device, if he or she prefers.

Nat Sobel of Sobel Weber Associates in New York represents several Western authors, among others. He says he's "not aware of any particular trends in the genre."

"I've not had any discussions with publishers that we should go with one title or another because it'll push a certain button, saleswise.

"More to the point in this genre is jacket art, which is requiring a whole new set of thought processes. Although the traditional genre Western is gone, the publishers are still frequently using the traditional genre art approach because they don't know of anything better to do. We're constantly fighting to get a fresh look on the books."

The traditional Western is dead? The old gunpowder-and-horse-manure books that my grandfather loved so well are *dead*? Grandpa was born in 1896.

"That's so. The old 65,000-word, 160-page category Western is no more," says Sobel. "It lies buried in Boot Hill since about 1987. Except for three or four name-brand authors—Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour, Max Brand—who are seeking a whole new generation of category Western readers, no publisher is buying new ones of that type. Your grandfather was the audience for that traditional category Western. When he died, so did the audience."

Sobel says his writers all come up with their own titles. In general, he doesn't believe that the title is all that important to marketing or sales of Western books.

"With this exception—everybody avoids the genre title," he adds. "You know, the *Shootout at Dry Gulch* kind of thing. Since everyone is getting away from the standard genre Western, they're getting away from the standard genre titles, too."

Elmer Kelton, one of Sobel's writers, hasn't written a traditional Western for ten years. He has an upcoming Western entitled *The Pumpkin Rollers*, and "it features a woman cattle rustler who is quite attractive and quite likeable," says Sobel.

Woman cattle rustler? Quite attractive? Grandpa must be rolling in his grave.

What about words like "rancher" or "cowboy" in the title—these words sell romance novels like hotcakes, or so many writers believe.

"Well, I don't see too much contemporary Western stuff where that might apply. We're up to about World War II; that's modern. But sure, the cowboy's a mythic figure. They're a vanishing breed, you know," Sobel reflects. "That's why every trucker driving an 18-wheeler wears cowboy boots and a Stetson."

But some words do punch buttons with readers, particularly in the romance fiction world.

Cowboy, baby, mommy, bride, wedding—even a cursory glance at a rack of books, particularly series romance novels, will have these words popping out. Still, some people—readers and editors alike—think it's overkill.

"The title's got to reflect the books honestly," insists

Eykelhof. "Sticking some cowboy or baby thing in the title, if that's a very minor element in the book is, I think, a cheap trick. As for generic, I still see more of what I would call generic-type titles in women's fiction, but they certainly don't work in series books."

As for certain key words—"Definitely there are those words that tell the reader what kind of story it is. They're provocative in that way," says Eykelhof. "The real danger is in overusing signal words—baby, cowboy, whatever—because then you create an impression of repetitiveness."

"The challenge is to come up with titles that signal those things but don't necessarily use those words, or use them in more interesting combinations or in a more interesting context."

"Ultimately, it's the story," says McCurdy firmly. "A good title or a good cover will work once. But if people don't like the story? *That* they'll remember and they won't buy the next one. You can tell by an upswing in sales, over time, that something's working. It's everything working together, of course, but the title is part of that. Over the course of time you can see the pattern."

So, what's an author to do? Where does she go to find the inspiration that will help her distill all of the above advice into two or maybe three crucial words that will mean the difference between so-so and wonderful?

Well, author Anne Avery mentions an intriguing list of names for iris that her agent gave her. That's right: iris as in flowers. I regularly ask the children in my school carpool for title ideas and am always amazed at what their fresh, unpolluted little minds come up with. Historical romance author Jo Beverley sometimes asks online friends for suggestions. Author Debbie Macomber told me last spring that she finds some of her best titles on the floor at the racetrack.

"Wayne and I went to the races in Seattle a few years back and I was looking at the card and suddenly it hit me, hey, wait a minute, there are some good titles here," says Macomber. "I started going around picking up pieces of paper off the floor—'Excuse me, excuse me, sir—could you please move your foot?'"

Macomber laughs. "I found a lot of great names from the horses and have used a lot of them for my titles. In fact," she adds. "I've got thousands in a data bank now and I get calls from other authors all the time, asking me to help them find a title. It's great!"

There you go, folks. What's in a name, indeed?

As Feroze Mohammed puts it: "This is all very subjective, you know, this is not a science." *NMK*

Judy E. Corser, who writes long contemporary romance under the pen name Judith Bowen, lives in British Columbia, Canada, and has an upcoming May title that contains—quite by design!—all of the "hot" buttons: The Rancher's Runaway Bride, Harlequin Superromance #739.

Erotica in the U.S. Tiptoeing into the Mainstream

By THEA DEVINE

"I didn't know there were books like that out there...."

Books like what? Oh, sexy, graphic, explicit, over the top, nasty, hard-edged, sex-larded books is what. Across the board, on the shelves of bookstores in the United States right now, there is an erotic novel for every taste. And they are not being marketed in plain brown wrappers. They're being sold through national book clubs like Doubleday and Literary Guild, both of whom have published two of the Black Lace series, and all of whom, including Book of the Month Club and Quality Paperback Book Club, routinely include flyers of erotic fiction among their offerings.

The readership has changed. What was once a traditional male market dominated by books that were realistic but focused solely on coupling has expanded to encompass books aimed at readers who like the varied, harder-nosed, more sophisticated story and—no surprise—women.

Kent Carroll of Carroll & Graf, which publishes erotic novels and story collections that go to multiple printings and generally remain available well after publication, says they also do mail order. Previously, mail order customers were 90% male. He now reckons 50% of the orders come from women, and that that audience is an extension of the romance market.

Harlequin apparently thinks so, too. They have inaugurated a special promotion within the Temptation line called "Blaze," which will have a flame effect on the covers to indicate the books are hotter than usual. These books, says editor Birgit Davis-Todd, can push the envelope, break the rules. It's a way to showcase sexier books. Harlequin plans to release five books over the course of the year; four are already slotted for April, June, August, and September.

For those who want to go somewhat more hardcore, Masquerade Books offers five different imprints catering to different tastes: Masquerade—straight erotica with an S/M bent, and classic Victorian Titles; Hard Candy—literary works by gay men and women; Rosebud—erotica for gay women; Badboy—erotica for gay men.

Collections of erotica for women have had great success in the marketplace as well. Herotica, which is published bi-annually by Penguin Books, is now seeking submissions of unconventional stories within conventional themes for book #6.

Others are jumping into the market. When Alexandra Kendall didn't see what she wanted to read in the marketplace, she decided to publish under her own Red Sage imprint. And Kathryn Falk created Lady Barrow's Secret Library to meet the demand of readers who wanted the more erotic read.

From my own experience, as my novels have gotten progressively more erotic, I've been able to write about consensual, erotic sex in a way that years ago would have been edited out in the blink of an eye. I think that says something about how much change, intensity, and sexuality the market will bear. The barriers are lifting; the readership is there. Publishers are beginning to notice. If *(continued on page 13)*

All Hands, Hear This!

(or, How to Write and Lift that Coffee Cup, Too)

All writers suffer occasional pangs of mental misery. They come with the job, caused by rejection slips or unflattering reviews or disappointing royalty checks. But there are other job-related stresses, too, and some of them are not in your head. Maybe they're in your wrist, your elbow, your shoulder.

The problem may sneak up on you—an ache here, a twinge there as you work at the keyboard, too absorbed in your latest plotline to pay much attention. Then it hits full force. You toss and turn for hours one night, wondering why the pain won't go away, wondering why you've waked two nights in a row with your hand numb and tingly. Then one day you try to pick up a glass of water and it slips out of your grasp—and suddenly, panic. This is carpal tunnel, one of the many work-related disorders that a hard-working author can face.

Carpal tunnel is only one type of repetitive stress injury. NBC News reported recently that repetitive stress injuries are the leading cause of lost work days in the United States.

The carpal tunnel is in the center of the wrist. It is a narrow tunnel formed by eight bones and a ligament, and houses tendons and a major nerve, the median nerve. When the median nerve is squeezed at the wrist, carpal tunnel syndrome results. Symptoms include numbness, a pins and needles-type tingling, lack of strength and grip, and burning pain. Women seem to be more susceptible than men.

Krissie Ohlrogge, who writes as Anne Stuart, says that ten years ago her first sign of problems to come was that her hands fell asleep at night. She thought her nightgown sleeves were too tight, and she cut them all up before realizing she needed to see a doctor.

Writer Judith Daniels remarks that she also had carpal tunnel pain before all the media attention hit. She downplayed the tingling in her hands until one day “my hand froze.” She could not pick up a piece of paper. Her doctor put her into a brace for months; she ultimately had surgery on both wrists and lots of physical therapy.

Author Jan Boies notes that she didn't have wrist problems until she got a new computer with Windows™ and began to use the mouse a lot more. I had the same experience. My first ancient computer didn't even have a mouse—my software was all DOS-based. A couple of years back, I bought a new computer equipped with Windows. When I began to use the mouse frequently, the problems—with my right hand, too, which is the one I use for the mouse—suddenly increased dramatically.

BTM—Before the Mouse—I'd had twinges of pain, sometimes having to rub my forearms at night or swallow an aspirin. But the discomfort was mild and I'd been writing and working at a computer for years.

By
CHERYL BYRD ZACH

I never thought I'd be a real casualty.

Then last year I had several books due in a row; another deadline was looming all too soon. I'd been working even longer

hours than usual and my right hand and arm started to hurt—noticeably hurt. But still, I didn't have time to stop; I had that deadline to meet. I took more aspirin, telling myself if it didn't go away, I'd make a doctor appointment after the manuscript was in the mail. The discomfort didn't disappear; it grew steadily worse, and I did make the appointment. By this time the pain was, well, agonizing—it ran from the inside of my thumb down my wrist and up my arm, and felt as if the bones were rubbing together. My advice to other writers—don't wait this long!

Jan says her pain went from her pointer finger to her wrist. She tried a hard plastic wrist support next to her keyboard—big mistake. It put pressure on the wrist and seemed to make the pain worse. She later discovered a gel-filled wrist support that was more effective. (A rolled-up towel works pretty well, too.)

Rhondi Salsitz, who writes mainstream suspense as Elizabeth Forrest, says her carpal tunnel pain has been crippling. The pain at night keeps her from sleeping and can't be relieved. She's had to take a couple of weeks off to allow the inflammation to go down. Krissie also notes that she's been forced to stop work for as long as two months.

In addition to the pain, Rhondi says that in her worst period she was unable to lift and hold pots and pans, and dropped breakables frequently. Krissie found that holiday tasks like cooking and cleaning or even wrapping gifts made the pain worse. I discovered that doing something as simple as pulling open the refrigerator door or lifting a carton of milk hurt—and I was apt to drop the milk. I couldn't lift my cat into my lap. I couldn't turn a manual can opener. The loss of strength was even more alarming than the pain. I had a glimpse of how a disabled person must feel—losing those simple, everyday powers you never appreciate till they are impossible to recall. I hated it.

So what can be done? Some writers have surgery to relieve the pain. One expert estimates that as many as 50% of carpal tunnel sufferers will end up having surgery, which can cost around \$2000, not including recovery time (four to six weeks) and lost income.

Most of us would rather escape the knife. That was certainly my preference. My doctor prescribed Relafen, two pills a day after the largest meal. (I learned later that one of my aunts has the same prescription for arthritis.)

My doctor also told me to wear a wrist splint. We had some miscommunication over this; I at first thought it was to wear while keyboarding, but later found it worked more effectively when worn at night.

Within a week, the Relafen helped the pain subside, but it took weeks for strength in my right hand to return. I felt very discouraged and on a later office visit asked the nurse-practitioner why it was taking so long. She told me that nerve damage takes longer to heal than skin or bone injuries. It didn't help that I had several trips scheduled during this period, and although I tried my best not to touch my luggage, a few times I had to lift a bag myself and that set back my recovery. In fact, some experts recommend that even simple movements of the afflicted hand(s), such as ringing a doorbell or holding a coffee cup, should be avoided for a week to ten days.

It took me at least three months to get somewhat back to normal, where I could pick up a full glass of liquid without wincing—or losing my grasp. I never stopped work completely—probably not the wisest thing I did—but I did cut back my hours at the keyboard, and I wore the splint religiously, both to work in and to sleep in. (It makes for clumsy typing, but you do get used to it.) I hope never to end up in such discomfort or be so handicapped again. I did discover that working long hours is a sure way to cause problems. Rhondi also warns other writers against “binge writing,” which will bring on flare-ups.

What else can writers do to avoid occurrences, or reoccurrences, of wrist, arm, or related pains? Freelance writer Denise Hawkins Camp says that the first thing she did when she showed signs of the syndrome was find a better chair. (I also discovered several years ago that a chair with armrests is imperative!) Then Denise bought light weights to keep at the desk to use during occasional breaks. The thing that helps her the most she discovered by accident: a manicurist who massages her forearms. Denise also does it herself and finds it very beneficial. (Start with thumb at the outer bone of wrist, go up and down forearm, thumb always on top, fanning out till you reach the inside of your elbow. Denise finds this also helps relieve aching elbows.)

Rhondi uses anti-inflammatory, over-the-counter medicines and wears a brace at night to keep wrist and hand immobile. She's tried an alternative keyboard, which seems to help. Her biggest discovery, however, is a new software program called VoiceType, by IMB (about \$99), which allows voice dictation into her computer. She says it is “not a cure-all, but an aid to productivity,” and it is fully compatible with Windows and her word processing software.

Krissie recommends a “wonderful book,” *Repetitive Stress Injury*, by Emile Pastorelli, which discusses many types of problems, of which carpal tunnel is one. She has also tried splints, ergonomic office equipment, a keyboard tray which adjusts to different levels, adjustable arms on her chair, and ergonomic keyboards, but although they can help, adds that, “Nothing stops it.” She's also checking out software which will allow her to dictate to her computer.

What didn't work for her: wearing the wrist splint in the daytime, physical therapy, cortisone shots for pain. And she advises writers not to be afraid to see more than one doctor, or different types of specialists, if the first or second do not seem helpful. The Pastorelli book cites a five- to six-doctor pilgrimage as common before getting a proper diagnosis.

(Note: Two recent updates: *USA Today* reports that the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health did a study of 50 female clerical workers and found no significant difference in comfort levels between those who used a conventional keyboard and those using alternative keyboard designs. And *Executive Health Magazine* has published a report of a possible link between carpal tunnel syndrome and a vitamin B deficiency.)

The most unusual treatment I heard about was from a masseuse who suffers from carpal tunnel pain in both hands. She uses hot paraffin treatments—coating the wrists and forearms in warmed paraffin. Very soothing, she feels. (Hot paraffin machines can be bought at beauty supply stores for around \$200. You may also find this treatment at your local spa or gym.)

If it helps, writers are not the only workers to suffer in high numbers from carpal tunnel and other repetitive stress injuries. Meat cutters and bus drivers are high risk, and there's something known as “bartender's thumb.” (No, I didn't—as Dave Barry often says—make that up.)

There are other types of injuries. Author Carla Neggers has suffered from a very painful impingement in her right shoulder triggered by an injury and then aggravated by keyboard use. (Impingement is one body structure pressing—or impinging—on another. The shoulder is a likely spot for problems.) Carla's physical therapist says that while even ergonomically correct posture is no guarantee for pain-free keyboarding, Carla was lifting her arm to reach her computer mouse—“a big no-no.”

The mouse must be level with your keyboard. Even better is one down by the space bar. Women, her physical therapist says, are more likely to suffer impingement. Carla prefers non-invasive treatment, “no anti-inflammatory drugs, needles, or knives.” Weekly physical therapy has helped her, plus various preventive exercise and stretches. She has moved the location of her mouse, stops work for periodic stretches, and works out on her NordicTrack three times a week—a motion that her PT says “is particularly good for this condition.”

Carla also invested in a Flexaball to stretch the back and shoulders, and does short weight routines designed specifically for this injury. She also advises other writers, “If it hurts, get help. Don't wait!” Waiting only makes it worse. And don't think it can't happen to you—she'd worked as a full-time writer for 15 years before feeling a twinge.

So what can we do to avoid carpal tunnel and other

>>>

Here are a few Web Sites of interest:

- ▼ Typing Injury FAQ Home Page
www.cs.princeton.edu/~dwallach/tifaq/
- ▼ Onsite Ergonomics Home Page
www.sirius.com/~gkarp/onsight/
- ▼ The Healthy Office
www.generalbusiness.com/cgi-bin/gb.cgi/healthy_office/healthyoffice.html

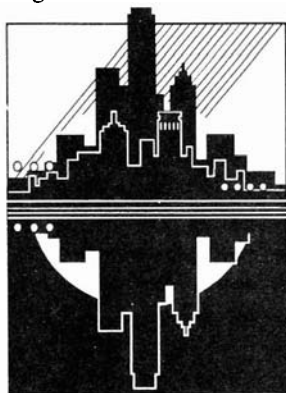
All Hands...

(Continued from page 9)

repetitive stress injuries with the accompanying pain and loss of work time? Stretching before keyboarding is highly recommended, as are frequent breaks. When you keyboard, make sure your wrist is straight from elbow to first finger knuckle, the fingers gently curved into a "C," as in the American signing symbol. Don't bend the wrist. Don't pound on the keyboard with unnecessary force. Support your wrists with arm rests placed at the correct height.

Sit with feet flat on the floor and shoulders relaxed, not pushed forward. Keep elbows at a 90 degree angle. Back should be straight or inclined slightly forward from the hips. The computer screen should be directly in front of you, your head held directly over your shoulders. Don't push your chin forward. Take frequent breaks, for the sake of your eyes as well as your hands, arms, and shoulders.

Some exercises suggested: hold your arms out and press your hands gently up, as if pressing a wall. Hold for five seconds, then down, and hold for five seconds. Make fists with your hands, then relax. Rotate hands at the wrists, clockwise then counterclockwise, then shake the fingers loosely. Lay your hand palm down on a flat surface and make the Vulcan greeting. (For non-Trekkers, make a V, two fingers on each side.) Then one at a time, lift one finger after another. Also, hold your fingers together; put a rubber band around the whole hand and push outward with all fingers.



Here it is, the long-awaited, longed-for, sought-after list of the Top Ten Things Most Often Asked About the 1997 Novelists, Inc. Conference!

1. Who's in Charge?

Answer: I am.

2. When is it?

October 16-19, 1997

3. Where is it?

The New York Marriott East Side Hotel on Lexington Avenue between 48th and 49th Streets

4. What's this going to cost me?

For shoulder pain: Lie on your back with fingers clasped behind your head; pull elbows back toward floor while bunching shoulder blades together. Also, sit with elbows on table and palms together; slowly lower wrists to table until a stretch is felt; keep palms together; repeat several times. With any exercise, if you feel pain or numbness, stop. Don't wait to see your doctor. Untreated carpal tunnel and other repetitive stress injuries can lead to permanent nerve damage—a fact that leaped out at me from a medical booklet while I waited nervously for my first visit with a doctor.

As Carla notes, "Writers are often more concerned with the mental aspects of our profession, but the physical aspects shouldn't be ignored—and when you finally are hurting, can't be. I now think of myself as a sort of writer-athlete who has to do warm-ups and training in order to do my work pain-free, injury-free for years to come."

Good advice! **NINK**

RWA Hall of Famer Cheryl Byrd Zach has published over 30 books for readers of different ages. Her latest releases are *The Mummy's Footsteps*, juvenile mystery, and *Carrie's Gold*, YA historical, both from Avon.

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.

NINC 1997 Conference Update aka Laura Resnick's "Top 10" List

Look at your preliminary brochure, coming in the April issue of NINK.

5. How do I make hotel reservations?
Calm down, would you? It's only March.

6. Do you want my suggestions?
Sure, but keep it clean.

7. Didn't you move recently?
That's right. Now you can reach me at:

Laura Resnick
1119-B Wareham Drive
Cincinnati OH 45202
(513) 723-1248

L.Resnick2@GEnie.com

8. Don't you have a fax machine, Resnick?

Yes, Jenniferson Roberson gave me one last July. But I have yet to figure out how to use it; which is a lot like not

having a fax machine at all.

9. Don't you have a book to write?

Yes, I do. So I need lots of volunteers to pull this thing off.... Hello? Hello? Are you still there?

10. Why should I come to yet another conference?

Because this is going to be the Coolest Conference Ever. We're going to have: a gala art show, featuring original artwork by professional cover artists; dangerous field trips; exotic workshops; dashing guest speakers; sweaty, sleeves-up discussions; great parties; bizarre demonstrations; and (drum roll, please) NO BANQUET!!!

11. Can't you count, Resnick? This is #11.

Ooops.

Using Internet Resources for Research

By
MICHAEL BANKS

As an information resource, the Internet is almost too good to be true. Never before has so much knowledge been so accessible to individuals. General and specialized information on history, science, culture, politics, geography—and just about any other topic you can imagine—resides on Web pages, in USENET Newsgroups, and in the minds of those accessing the Internet.

The World Wide Web is the most evident—and the richest—of the Internet's knowledge repositories. Web pages host electronic versions of reference works, virtual museums of history and culture, current news, maps, essays, and much, much more. The Web is richly laden with photos, text, and even multimedia information resources that rival some of the best libraries in the world.

Public discussion forums, including USENET Newsgroups and bulletin boards on online services, also serve as information repositories and, at times, sources of information-on-demand.

In sum, the Internet's collective components offer the knowledge of millions of experts and researchers. To say that the quantity of information stored on tens of millions of Web pages is staggering is an understatement. It is a true treasure-trove for any writer.

The only problem is, how do you access all of this information? Far from being a well-organized library with card catalogs and information neatly sorted, the Internet is an anarchy, with information scattered hither and yon.

How do you go about finding specific information? How, for instance, can you find information on Muslim life in the 19th-century Russian Empire? Whom do you ask? Is there a Web site for it? If so, what is the address? How can you know whether such information even exists?

The answer to that question—and the key to finding almost anything on the Internet—is “Search engines.”

▼ Search Tools for the Web

Search engines are as close to card catalogs or indices as you will see on the Web. They use sophisticated software to catalog tens of millions of Web pages worldwide. Frequently updated, the catalogs are put at your disposal in searchable format.

Appropriately, search engines exist as Web sites. Visit one, and you will find a form into which you can enter a “query.” Do not let the term “query” mislead you, though; you can't just type in a question. You have to tell the search engine to find what you want using key words or phrases. (These are also known as search terms.)

A key word is a word that is associated with what you want to find. Just as you enter a last name when you want to find someone in your name and address database, so you enter a major associated word when searching for information on a certain topic. For example, a key word for finding information on Muslim life in the 19th-century

Russian Empire would be “Muslim.” If you enter that in a search engine's query form, you will get a listing with something on the order of 40,000 Web pages.

That's obviously too many to wade through; you want to do something to narrow your search. Narrowing a search reduces the number of “hits” a query returns. It is accomplished by limiting the range of the search. This can be done by specifying an additional key word. (If you are lucky, there will be an unusual word associated with your subject, like “mitochondria.” This will return very few documents.)

Before I show you how to do that, it will help if you know what is happening in the background. Search engines look for information you request based on the contents of Web pages. Thus, if you query a search engine with a key word, you are asking it to show you all Web pages that contain the key word you've specified. A word like “Muslim” would get all sorts of Web pages—current events, news, religious essays, personal resumés, and just about any other sort of document you might expect to contain the word. This sort of search might be considered a “subject search.”

Knowing that search engines look at the entire content of every Web page they catalog, you have a better idea of how to refine your search. All you have to do to limit the number of hits is get specific. So, you add a couple of key words. In this case, maybe “Russian” and “19th.” This tells the search engine that you want to see only Web pages that contain the words “Muslim,” “Russian,” and “19th.” This will return fewer Web pages, few enough that you can go through a listing manually and find what you want.

If you didn't find what you wanted with a narrowed search, you might widen the search by removing one of the key words. Or, you might go to another set of key words entirely.

Note that each search engine operates a little differently. There are variations in how you enter multiple key words. For example, one of the most comprehensive and powerful search engines, Alta Vista (located at <http://altavista.digital.com>), requires that you enter multiple key words like this:

+ Muslim + Russian + 19th

This is how you tell Alta Vista that you want to see all Web pages that contain “Muslim” and “Russian” and “19th”—also known as an AND search. Without the + signs, Alta Vista would interpret your request as, “Show me all Web pages that contain *any* of these words.” (That is, “Muslim” or “Russian” or “19th”) This approach—called an OR search—would give you a list of a few hundred thousand Web pages—obviously not what you want.

Another search engine may require only that you enter multiple key words separated by spaces. Some search engines, like Lycos (at <http://www.lycos.com>), cannot do AND searches, and will interpret multiple key words >>>

Using the Internet...

(Continued from page 11)

as an OR search. However, search engines that operate in this manner usually give you a “scored” list of results. This means Web pages that contain all three words would be listed first, those with two of the three words second, and so on. A very few search engines have buttons you can press to specify an AND or OR search with multiple key words. A search engine called “Hotbot” is one such.

You can also use phrases as search terms with many of the search engines. These are good when you are searching for documents based on a phrase that they ought to contain. (Note that you may find this disappointing; the phrase you think should be in any document about a given topic may be in none. But it is worth a try.) Enter something like “Muslim life in the 19th-Century Russian Empire,” and you will get a list of all Web pages that contain that phrase—which is to say, all of those words in that specific order.

(For the curious: There really is a Web site devoted to this somewhat obscure topic. The URL is: http://www.uoknor.edu/cybermuslim/russia/rus_home.html.)

A final flourish that some search engines offer is the ability to narrow searches by making selections on a form. Such additions allow you to specify an AND or an OR search, and to limit your search to a certain category of Web pages.

▼ Major Search Engines:

- AltaVista - <http://altavista.digital.com>
- Excite - <http://www.excite.com/>
- HotBot - <http://www.hotbot.com/>
- InfoSeek - <http://www.infoseek.com/>
- Lycos - <http://www.lycos.com>
- WebCrawler - <http://wcl.webcrawler.com/>
- Yahoo - <http://www.yahoo.com>

Several of these search engines—Excite, Hotbot, Infoseek, Lycos, and Yahoo—let you do subject searches by browsing categories of Web pages, each of which has sub-categories. Thus, a government category may offer “State” and “Federal” sub-categories. (Beware of getting too involved in browsing search lists, however. They can be very distracting!)

Note that many of these search engines can be directed to search either Web pages, or USENET Newsgroups. Alta Vista, Excite, Infoseek, and Yahoo offer this option. A few can even be directed to search reviews or current news for your key word or phrase.

Again, each search engine varies in how it is used. Be sure to read the instructions or help files for the search engine you are using. (Note: In all, there are some 1,200 search engines on the Web. Those listed here are the best general search engines.)

▼ Specialized Search Engines

There are a large number of specialized search engines,

most of which are actually just specialized databases. These are devoted to specific subject-areas, such as chemistry, medicine, and history. There are far too many to list here, but you can get several lists of specialized search engines using Alta Vista. Go to <http://altavista.digital.com>, and enter this search, including the quotes:

“Specialized Search Engines”

This will give you a list of several dozen specialized search engines.

▼ USENET Newsgroups

USENET Newsgroups are an interesting source of information (and often entertainment) on just about any subject. For those who are unfamiliar with Newsgroups, USENET is a system of posted messages and replies that are organized into conversation threads. The noise-to-signal ratio is rather high, but it is possible to isolate relevant discussion threads and thus get useful information—or find people who have the information you need.

Discussion threads take place within any of nearly 20,000 Newsgroup topics. (For a current listing of Newsgroups visit this URL: <http://www.yahoo.com/news/usenet>)

As noted, several search engines can be directed to search USENET Newsgroups. These are valuable when you want to examine current (or past) discussions on a given topic. The same search rules apply with regard to search terms as when you are searching the Web.

An even better search tool for Newsgroups is Deja News (<http://www.dejanews.com/forms/dnq.html>). This search engine is tied to an archive of current and past postings in every Newsgroup in existence. The archive database is searchable by key word or phrase, with pushbuttons that let you specify whether current or old USENET postings are searched, the order in which results are displayed, etc.

The Deja News database currently has Newsgroup postings back to 1994. It will eventually contain virtually every posting since USENET’s inception in 1979.

▼ People as Resources

If you can’t find the information you need on your own, the best thing to do is ask an expert. While asking a stranger for detailed information may seem to be an intrusion, I have found the opposite to be the case. Most people’s favorite topics (next to him- or herself) are their work and hobbies. When I was writing science fiction in the 1970s and ’80s, I would routinely call a local university’s Physics or Chemistry department if I needed to settle a technical point in a story. Without exception, the professors I spoke with were delighted to be consulted as experts in their respective fields. The same was true when I was doing a series of articles on radio-control aircraft; hobbyists were more than happy to tell me everything I needed to know, and then some.

Given that you are potentially in touch with tens of millions more people online than you are in the real world, the pool of experts online is enormous. Usually, you can find several experts on a given topic if you post a query in

the appropriate USENET Newsgroup, or in a bulletin board in the proper area on an online service.

If you're uncertain as to where you might place a query, or don't want your e-mail address picked up by spammers (those people who flood your e-mail box with get-rich-quick schemes and other useless verbiage), you can often locate an expert with a search. For USENET, use Deja News to locate discussions on your subject of interest. This done, you can scan postings to see who seems to know the most about the subject in question.

Online service bulletin boards (usually located within Forums or special-interest groups) can be searched, or at least browsed, depending on how the bulletin boards are set up. In either case, once you locate a person or persons who seem to know what you want, you can e-mail them with your questions. (It helps to mention that you are a writer, of course; being consulted by a writer of any kind is very flattering to most folks.)

▼ Caveat

You may have thought of this already, but you should know that not all information you find on the Internet is accurate. Many Web sites are established by people who have a personal agenda, or for whatever other reasons slant information in a certain way. This slanting may consist of omitting information, presenting opinion as fact, or lying outright.

This phenomenon is not limited to Web sites created by individuals or fringe groups. Even news reports from "legitimate" sources are often slanted. More factual information, posted by individuals, experts, organizations such as museums or colleges, or whomever, should also be viewed with just a pinch of skepticism.

Too, some well-meaning individuals may post partially false or incomplete information because they are not as informed as they should be on a given subject.

My advice on this front is simple: If the information seems inconsistent, incomplete, or doesn't make sense, check it with another source.

This is not to say that most information online is suspect. Only a small portion of online information is misleading or untrue. However, since there is no requirement for fact-checking or accuracy online, it is prudent to verify the validity of online information.

Avoid the mystique of the Internet as an all-knowing source. Approach it pragmatically as a series of databases, commentary, and expert sources, and you will find the Internet to be an endless font of knowledge. **NINK**

Michael A. Banks is the author of 38 published novels and nonfiction books, and nearly 3,000 magazine articles and short stories. He first logged on to an online service in 1979, and has been writing about the online world since 1985. His latest books are The Internet Unplugged (Pemberton Press) and Web Psychos (Coriolis Books). (Banks notes that the latter book, a guide to protecting your personal information and privacy on the Internet, will probably have a new title by the time it ships, in April, 1997.)

Tiptoeing... (Continued from page 7)

you want to try your hand, below is a select list of markets suited to every taste.

Carroll & Graf - 260 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10001, publishes six books a season, both novels and collections of stories in hardcover and trade paperback. The books are distributed through bookstores and by mail order. Advances up to \$10,000, standard royalties. Submissions should be sent to Kent Carroll at the above address.

Masquerade - 801 Second Avenue, New York NY 10001, publishes nine mass market and two trade paperbacks per month, and a bi-monthly erotic newsletter. Submissions are accepted in both novel and short story form, though they prefer novels of 60,000 words. Contracts include all subsidiary rights. Send submissions to the attention of the Editor, and designate the imprint for which manuscript is intended (list above).

Herotica - Down There Press, 938 Howard, San Francisco CA 94103, is seeking submissions for Herotica 6. Stories should be between 5-20 double-spaced manuscript pages. Remuneration is \$15 per page. Send to Leigh Davidson, address above. Also, Marcy Sheiner of Down There is looking for Jewish Erotica, stories about Jewish women's experiences. This is speculative only.

Harlequin Temptation "Blaze" - If you are interested in writing for this line, you are encouraged to call any of the Temptation editors to discuss your idea to see if it's in synch with what the editors want. The story can be more sensual and graphic, and the characters can be in risqué situations. Harlequin's phone number is 416-445-5860; Birgit Davis-Todd is the editor.

Red Sage - Secrets Anthology, P.O. Box 4844, Seminole FL 33775, Alexandra Kendall, editor. Wants unusual and different sensual stories in a historical context, 20-30,000 words, for Secrets III. Pays \$50 advance, and a 6% royalty split among contributing authors. Distribution via mail order at the above address. Secrets I and II are available now.

Lady Barrow's Secret Library - Kathryn Falk will be launching her line of ultrasensual novels in 1998; she is not accepting submissions yet. Word length will be 90,000 words. They will be distributed by mail, and tipsheets should be available in the fall.

And finally, **The Erotic Reader's Association** is an online repository of information about erotic books, movies, music, guidelines for authors, favorite scenes, discussions, reviews, and shared experiences. Address is <http://www.elite.net/~natasha/era/> **NINK**

Thea Devine is the author of fourteen steamy historical romances, the most recent of which, Desire Me On!, (Zebra Books, June 1997), is a July featured alternate of the Doubleday Book Club.



This month I went searching for some really comprehensive web sites—sites you may want to link your own pages to, as well as sites you'll want to use yourself for research. Here are the three best ones I found, in ascending order: The Internet Roadmap to Books at http://www.bookport.com/b_roadmap has a bunch of great links to book-related sites, to include NINC's own home page. Beaucoup at <http://www.beaucoup.com/engines.html> is essentially a search engine for search engines. It has links to 38 general search engines, 15 multiple search engines, and impressive lengths of "specialty" engines such as media-related, geographical (global), software, reference/language/literature (these looked like they'd be very useful to writers!), education/schools, employment, and more.

The best, though, had to be the Writer's Guild Links page, at <http://www.wga.org/tools/WGALinks.html>. NINC member Carolyn Greene brought this one to my attention, and she described it as a "List of search engines for looking up topics, people, places, or organizations; screenwriter sites; a bookshelf, which includes links to the Human Languages Page, Internet Public Library searchable database of quotations, and more; movie and TV info; newspapers and magazines; Law Enforcement & Crime, which has links to the American Bar Association, decisions of the US Supreme Court, FBI, and something called "The Spy Shop"; Government (CIA and White House); children; weather and travel; classics; medical info; history (including links to a rare map collection); and science and science fiction. This is a site you'll return to many times." I checked it out myself, and boy, is she right! Thanks, Carolyn!

A couple of other goodies from Carolyn: <http://www.wga.org/journal/1996/0976/scriptware/intro.html> "This is a page within the Writer's Guild Web site in which Elaine Spooner reviews approximately 15 scriptwriting and plotting programs, including Collaborator, Fiction Master, Writer's Block, Story Vision, and others." <http://www.writerscomputer.com> "This is the site for the Writer's

Computer Store in California which sells all sorts of scripting and other writing software. You can also download a demo of Writer's Blocks, which helps you arrange and rearrange the scenes in your script or novel."

These finds grew out of a discussion on Ninlink on writing/plotting software. Rather to my surprise, quite a lot of people (including some illustrious names!) have found some of these programs amazingly helpful. Probably the most praised was Collaborator. Demo software is available for free online at <http://www.collaborator.com>

Now, a few miscellaneous tidbits: As many of you may know, America Online was hit with a class-action suit by frustrated subscribers who felt they weren't getting what they'd paid for because of clogged access lines. AOL settled, offering refunds and/or credits. Any AOL subscribers might want to look into that. AT&T customers looking for cheap Internet access can sign onto AT&T Worldnet and get five free hours a month. Not a bad idea if you want a "backup" to your regular server. You can sign up at <http://www.att.com/worldnet> or call 1-800-400-1447. And remember, if all you want is e-mail (and you're not on a Macintosh), there's Juno.com's free service. Call 1-800-654-JUNO to get their free software. And finally, another web-ring for authors with Web sites. <http://www.eclectics.com/authorring.html> gives detailed instructions for linking your site to the ring.

I've run a bit long, so I'll only mention a very few of the fascinating topics we've discussed on the Ninlink listserv: tips for giving speeches; male vs. female viewpoints; comparisons of foreign markets; writer's block and books to help us get past it. Some titles that many people found enormously helpful in dealing with writer's block included *Writing Past Dark*, by Bonnie Friedman; *The Courage to Write*, by Ralph Keyes; *A New Approach to Creativity*, by Victoria Nelson; *Simple Abundance*, by Sarah Ban Breathnach; and *The Artist's Way*, by Julia Cameron.

Remember, to subscribe to Ninlink, just send an e-mail to ninlink-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) below that. And don't forget to send any online-related news to me at brendahb@aol.com!

See you online!

— Brenda Hiatt Barber :)

INTRODUCING...

The following authors have applied for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this NINC issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

New Applicants

LaRee Bryant, Irving TX
Janet Evanovich (Steffie Hall), Hanover NH
Candice Hern, San Francisco CA
Sherry-Anne Jacobs (Anna Jacobs, Shannah Jay),

Mandurah, Western Australia
Sylvie Kurtz, Milford NH
Mary McGuinness, Euclid OH

New Members

Alice Duncan (Emma Craig, Rachel Wilson), Roswell NM
Margaret Falk, Tucson AZ
Susan Krinard, Concord CA
Caiseal Mòr, Glebe, New South Wales, Australia
Sam J. Siciliano, Vancouver WA
Trana Mae Simmons, Terrell TX
Jennifer Smith (Jennifer Crusie), Columbus OH
Gay Cameron Snell (Gay Cameron), Alexandria VA
Deb Stover, Monument CO



EAST OF THE HUDSON

BFOs and "I Didn't Know That, Ollie!"

Every year I read the "state of the industry" report from *Publishers Weekly* with great interest. This year I was really looking forward to the report. Our business is in as much disarray as a strumpet's petticoats, and I expected PW to provide sober guidance through the minefields.

Alas.

Alack, too. No such luck. It seems to me that this year's PW year-ender shed little light on the causes of the disarray and less on potential ameliorations. Oh, sure, there were a couple of interesting tidbits, the kinds of things that made me say, along with Stan Laurel, "I didn't know that, Ollie."

Sadly, there were almost as many of what my friend, George Stoner, calls "blinding flashes of the obvious." My own favorite BFO, one I can personally attest to, is "Never clean the dog yard with a weed whacker."

Here, in no real order, are a couple of "Ollies," and one or two BFOs gleaned from PW:

Last year was a wretched one. If this weren't a family newsletter, I'd use even more colorful language to describe it. The publishers, the booksellers, the chains, the garden shops, the superstores—everybody agrees the book business went in the tank in 1996.

Gosh, I didn't realize that.

The culprits were many, of course, but the big one seems to be returns. In other words, the publishers printed a hell of a lot of books that went out to bookstores and then came rebounding back. Wags in the industry call it "Gone today, here tomorrow."

There are lots of theories about the phenomenon but no single one answers all questions. The booksellers say the publishers push too many books on them. The publishers say the booksellers, worrying about the slowness of the reorder process, order too many copies, just to be sure, because there is no penalty for returns.

I can't sort it out myself, but I think there are a couple of problems. First, as I have said before, publishers are pumping out a lot of books nobody wants to read. Locked in their Trump Tower world, the decision-makers of Manhattan have veered off into choices that make no sense to the rest of us, out here in the fly-over states.

Second, because the business is dominated by large, unwieldy corporations, publishers have missed trends that were taking off, trends like Internet bookselling.

Amazon, Inc., the Seattle-based Internet book provider, is in its first year of real operation. In fact, the operation has been fully operational only since April. Yet Amazon is going to have a \$17 million year.

I am indebted to Alberto Vitale, head honcho of the Random House wheel, for the Amazon insight. In the PW

roundup, he was also quoted as spotting a potential trend in the fact that one Knopf title sold 76 copies through the publisher's Internet Web site while, *during the same period, only 10 copies sold through the entire Borders chain.*

Way to go, Alberto. You've taught me something new. (I'll have more to say about him later, though.)

Here's another nugget, though I'm not sure whether it's an "Ollie" or a BFO:

Advances are too high.

Yep, all the publishers agree. Authors and their agents are demanding too much money. And apparently, in too many cases, publishers are agreeing to these ridiculous and unwarranted demands.

Anthea Disney, head of Harper, sounded the plaint: "While the price of doing business—the advances—seems to be going through the ceiling, the opportunities to sell more copies of those books is not increasing at the same rate. This is not a very good mathematical formula."

I didn't know that, Ollie. Maybe it was just too obvious for my unsophisticated mind to grasp.

Another Ollie—this one, too, from Alberto Vitale. He's still convinced the industry publishes too many books. As a matter of fact, Random House is cutting back yet once again, he says, reducing its trade list by another 10 to 15% next year.

Aw, c'mon, Alberto. I know you want to raise your average, but I don't think you'll do it by limiting your times at bat. You don't see Ken Griffey, Jr. benching himself for the season after he goes five for five on opening day. If you're going to be a player, Al, you've got to step up to the plate.

If I'm being tough on the guy, forgive me, but there's a reason. Alberto and his shrinking lists have downsized my wife and me twice in the past decade, once when he ran Bantam Doubleday Dell, and once more when we were being published inside the Random House wheel at Villard.

Each time we survived, although the last time led to the premature demise of a couple of friends of ours, Fiddler and Fiora. In fact, if I ever write another Fiddler book, the chief villain will be a short, bright little man with two Italianate names. Creating villains is my favorite form of vengeance.

Laying aside old grudges, though, I fear Alberto may be right. There are a great many books being published. Or rather, there are a great many books being published that don't get supported and therefore don't become bestsellers. Nobody's figured out how to change that, so I fear the bean-counters will continue to call the shots and we will see another year of shrinking lists all over the industry.

Coupled with the shrinkage of potential markets as the result of Penguin's acquisition of Putnam, this means we are looking at fewer markets into which to sell our work.

PW noted that the Big Seven publishers, who sold 87.9% of the hardback market last year and more than 80% of the paperbacks, is now the Big Six.

Another BFO, that. The big get bigger and the little fall behind. It's not a pretty dynamic, but I'm afraid it's as real as tectonics.

But then, we writers were getting too greedy, anyway, I know that for a fact, because I read it in *Publishers Weekly*.

— Evan Maxwell



The Fast Track

Compiled by MARILYN PAPPANO

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. Marilyn's phone/fax number is 918-227-1608, fax 918-227-1601 or online: pappanor@gorilla.net. Internet surfers can find the list at: <http://www.usatoday.com> (Et al.: written with other author(s) who aren't members of NINC)

Member	Title	Jan 1	Jan 8	Jan 15	Jan 22	Jan 29
William Bernhardt	<i>Cruel Justice</i> , Ballantine			86n	87	132
Elaine Coffman	<i>If You Love Me</i> , Fawcett		253n	58	59	108
Clive Cussler	<i>Shock Wave</i> , Pocket	71	52	76	104	
Clive Cussler, et al.	<i>The Sea Hunters</i> , Simon & Schuster	126	118			
Christina Dodd	<i>A Knight to Remember</i> , HarperMonogram		137n			
Suzanne Forster	<i>Innocence</i> , Berkley				65n	86
Tami Hoag	<i>Guilty as Sin</i> , Bantam			12n	6	9
Iris Johansen	<i>The Ugly Duckling</i> , Bantam	73	24	35	49	65
Andrea Kane	<i>Legacy of the Diamond</i> , Pocket				150n	
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Absolutely, Positively</i> , Pocket	120	67	101	167	144
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Deep Waters</i> , Pocket				47n	50
Judith McNaught	<i>Remember When</i> , Pocket	124	117			
Peggy Moreland	<i>Rugrats and Rawhide</i> , Silhouette			143n		
Barbara Parker	<i>Blood Relations</i> , Signet	189n	120			
Susan Elizabeth Phillips	<i>Nobody's Baby but Mine</i> , Avon			33n	15	40
Rita Rainville	<i>City Girls Need Not Apply</i> , Silhouette					146n
Christine Rimmer	<i>Wife Wanted</i> , Silhouette			70	109	
Nora Roberts	<i>Holding the Dream</i> , Jove	80	31	44	75	92

Publishing Services by Sandy Huseby

Novelists' Ink

Novelists, Inc.

An organization for writers of popular fiction

P.O. Box 1166

Mission KS 66222-0166

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