

Novelists' Ink

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

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Changing the Bestseller Map: What *USA Today* Tells Writers That They Never Knew Before

When *USA Today* debuted in 1982, established big-city dailies eyed the “national” daily newspaper’s spot color and snappy news-you-can-use articles and dismissed it as “MacPaper.”

But the upstart paper has enjoyed the revenge of all things ahead of their time. Besides wallpapering every airport and enjoying a circulation of a million-and-a-half (almost two million on Fridays), *USA Today* has spawned that infallible and sincere sign of success, outright imitation.

No major newspaper today dares *not* run the color-cued national weather map *USA Today* introduced; all now have converted to color photos.

The Monday-to-Friday national daily broke the mold with more than weather coverage and color photos: on October 28, 1993, it ignored the decades-old, black-and-white, win-lose pattern of calculating bestselling books by printing not just the nation’s traditional top ten or 15 bestselling books, but the top 50.

Trick or treat, Book World!

And the paper listed these 50 books not according to category, but according to sales figures: fiction socialized with

nonfiction, paperbacks rubbed spines with hardcovers, adult titles mingled with young adult and children’s books. Whatever sold the most copies, ranked highest. Period.

This revolutionary revision of bestseller-list format democratized the heretofore exclusive lists, just as

By
CAROLE NELSON DOUGLAS

the paper’s colored maps had nationalized the local weather. Unfortunately, this is one area where *USA Today*’s innovation has not been followed.

Almost every veteran book writer knows that those traditional top ten and 15 lists from the *New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, et al. can be manipulated. We know that publishers slot books for bestsellerdom by enlisting the Four Horsemen of the Bestseller Lists: sheer push, princely promotional budgets, print run, and store-placement payments can pretty much insure a book’s bestseller ranking on the traditional lists. Despite the occasional fluke of a book unexpectedly making a list, the rules of the game hold.

Every bestseller list is skewed in its own way, of course—by which book chains and stores contribute figures, by who knows which stores are polled, and who can make special efforts there. Even authors have sometimes successfully manipulated this system. But the rules of the game have been altered forever, resulting in a far more accurate and publicly accessible picture of bookselling patterns than before.

In the fall of 1993, not only did *USA Today* print the top 50 best-selling titles, it tracked the top 300, and eventually made the top 150 list available to all interested parties via 900-number, then mail subscription, and finally on the paper’s Internet home page, whose address (continued on page 4)

**The Four Horsemen of
the Bestseller Lists:
sheer push, princely
promotional budgets,
print run, and
store-placement
payments...**

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

**This Month
from the
President:**

*...the lion's
share is for
nonfiction...we
urge you to fill
out your sur-
vey forms.*

HOW DO YOU SPEND \$22,000?

NINC recently received our 1996 disbursement from the Author's Coalition, a check for over \$21,000 (it was late because of contract negotiating delays). This money will be used for projects that directly benefit our members, so we'd like suggestions from you on how you want to see us spend it.

In the past, we have used the Author's Coalition money for things like compiling and printing the *Guide to Agents* and conducting the Lottery Audit. The Board has decided to do another Lottery Audit this year, so we'll be spending part of the money on that. Watch for your entry form in the next few months.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM? Many members have wondered where the Author's Coalition gets the money it sends us. The answer is complex, but I'll give you the short version. In many European countries, the copyright laws allow for the photocopying of copyrighted material so long as a royalty is paid to the author of that work. As you can imagine, keeping track of exactly which authors are entitled to how much money is an enormous task, and many thousands of dollars remained unclaimed. Consequently, Kopinor, the agency in Norway which collects the photocopying royalties there, asked several national writers' organizations to form a coalition that could receive the money and use it to benefit writers. To date, the coalition consists of ten writers' groups to whom the money is distributed with the stipulation that they use it for the direct benefit of published writers—the people to whom the money would have been paid directly if Kopinor had been able to identify them.

WHO DETERMINES HOW MUCH MONEY NINC RECEIVES? Kopinor tells the Author's Coalition how much of the royalties was for copying sheet music, how much for fiction, how much for nonfiction, and so on. Each member organization surveys its membership to determine how many of its members are published in each category. (Remember those survey forms you filled out at renewal time? This is what they're for!) The Coalition's Administrator, who happens to be our own Marianne Shock, then figures out how much of each portion of the monies received should go to each organization. In NINC, of course, 100% of our members are published fiction writers, but that doesn't help us get a lot of money. You see, only a small portion of the royalties is for photocopying works of fiction. The lion's share is for copying nonfiction, particularly academic works and newspaper and magazine articles. We survey our members to see how many are also published in those areas, and then we get a portion of that money based on how many members we have whose work might have been photocopied. This is why we urge you to fill out your survey forms. The more of our members who are published in the various areas, the more money we will receive and the more projects we can do.

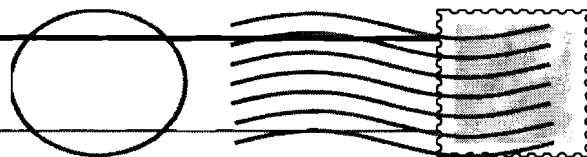
Only 341 of our 581 members filled out their surveys so far this year. If you didn't, it's not too late. Please send yours in today. The Coalition will be doing the 1997 distribution in a few months, and we want NINC to receive our fair share of those funds.

CONFERENCE NOTE:

We'll be using some of the Coalition money to subsidize NINC's conference this year. Even still, the conference will be more expensive than usual—but we're also planning to give you a lot more for your money this year in the Big Apple. Look for details in the conference report on page 6 and in the insert with this issue.

— Victoria Thompson

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



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

Computer Wars

Anyone who uses a computer could stand to read Cheryl Zach's article on occupational ailments like carpal tunnel. I am currently "in remission," having treated my CPS with wrist braces, heating pads, ibuprofen, and rest. But even at this moment I'm feeling a twinge in my elbow that reminds me how fragile the nervous system is.

One doctor told me that once you have the tendency toward inflammation, you'll get it everywhere, not just in the initial sore spot. I first got carpal tunnel when I was pregnant during the hottest summer in a century. My wrists swelled and compressed that nerve. I couldn't type—I couldn't open my hand until noon most days! That vanished the day my son was born, but has recurred in lesser strength every few months since.

I caused more problems when I took up fencing (for research purposes!) and injured my left shoulder. While ibuprofen took care of the shoulder pain, the nerves in my left arm, especially through my elbow to my little finger, have never been the same. It's worst in the summer when the heat causes swelling.

Wrist braces help, but I can't wear them at night because my wrists swell most then. I raised my desk chair, and got a wrist rest for the keyboard, and that helped. The most effective solution for me is frequent breaks...and that wreaks havoc with my concentration.

It's depressing to read that the new alternate keyboards aren't a panacea, but I'll try the exercise and massage described in the article and hope that helps stave off the next attack.

Thanks for the information.

— **Alicia Rasley**

Stress Injuries Epidemic

I devoured the excellent article on repetitive stress injury (All Hands, Heart This!) in the March issue. I believe we're in the middle of an epidemic, one which has serious consequences for writers in a competitive market.

Thank you for some vital information. Here's another therapy that's helped me: I keep a foam rubber squeeze ball next to my computer to exercise my hands while I'm thinking, swearing, sweating blood. I also take the squeeze ball with me when I take walks or when I watch TV.

Although I stumbled onto this idea, I've since learned that physical therapists recommend the technique to carpal tunnel sufferers.

— **Vicki Lewis Thompson**

Library Book Rentals

Janelle Taylor sent a clipping from the Tuesday, February 18, 1997 edition of *The Augusta Chronicle*. The article, written by Brian Neill of the South Carolina Bureau, reports that the Aiken County Public Library has started a "Rental Collection." The Collection "contains multiple copies of books available to rent at \$1 for four days. The collection includes popular titles such as *Airframe*, by Michael Crichton; *Executive Order*, by Tom Clancy; and *Silent Honor*, by Danielle Steel." Neill adds, "The library will still stock new bestsellers for regular library checkout and there is a 25-cent-per-day charge for Rental Collection books kept more than four days. The Collection was established by the Friends of the Library, which will use fees and fines to buy more books.

Erotic Address Update

Thank you for the mention of the Guild in your February '97 newsletter. However, since you spoke to us for that article, our correspondence address has changed. Is it possible for you to let your readers know that we can now be reached at the following address:

Guild of Erotic Writers

CTCK, PO Box 8431, London, SE84BP.

Thanks for your help.

— **Elizabeth Coldwell**

« Words to Write By »

Be comfortable being uncomfortable. It may get tough, but it's a small price to pay for living your Dream.

Do It! Let's Get Off Our Buts

By John-Roger and Peter McWilliams

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.

Changing the Bestseller Map...

(Continued from page 1)

appears in *Novelists' Ink's* monthly "Fast Track" feature. (It's my understanding that only the top 150 titles are made public because each title must be confirmed; extending this checking process to the 151-300 titles would be time-consuming, expensive, and far beyond the paper's mission. Anything that might persuade management to make the 151-300 titles available on a limited basis, such as to publishers and writers' groups, would be a boon to authors, but isn't likely to happen. I've already asked. Perhaps a query from the Writers' Coalition...?)

After this startling departure, the *USA Today* list was further refined to record where new top-150 books had been the previous week in the 151-300 list. This gave an even better picture of movement among the unreported titles. On occasion, a report of a 151-300 appearance reached an author or publisher, encouraging a new career drive for them both.

I know, because in late 1994, my third Mid-night Louie mystery was one of these "dark horse" titles on the 151-300. That's when I realized that I wanted—nay, *needed*—better access. I subscribed by 900-number for a fax, at \$3 a weekly call for six weeks or so when my books were first out. If they didn't make the top 150 list, I could at least see what books were there during that period. But the 900-number fax service ended in late 1995, and the subscription fee was stiff for an individual. The Novelists, Inc. board approved my proposal for an institutional subscription, with members' titles that made it to be listed in the monthly newsletter. Then, suddenly the list was available on the World Wide Web, and I was launched into cyberspace to find it.

Although the recognition "Fast Track" gives bestselling members is well-deserved, I believed that a better acquaintance with the *USA Today* list would especially benefit members not yet on the list. I'm convinced that all Novelists, Inc. members, veteran professionals, have bestselling potential, given an even break. But some up-and-coming members might not have easy access to the nonprinted 150 list. Proof positive of climbing that list would be immensely cheering, motivating, and useful in promoting their careers.

Visible progress is almost impossible to see in the publishing business.

To survive, authors must be alert to when they are being under-promoted, must see that if their house is "pushing" another author, it's because that author's books are making bestseller lists and isn't due to in-house politics. They need to know where they and their books are.

Tracking the *USA Today* bestseller list gives every author that information, and more.

Books rise on such lists like the ball on the old-time strength-measuring machines at circuses. Author and publisher hammer down on the bottom mechanism as hard as they can. Fueled by this impetus, the ball shoots up the gauge, pauses—sometimes it seems forever—and then inevitably, slowly or quickly, slides back down the vertical chute.

Analyzing the eternal up-and-down process of various books tells much about what's selling: which fiction and nonfiction books, which genres of fiction and topics of nonfiction, which authors, which publishing houses.

Here are observations I've made over the past 15 months by studying the *USA Today* list.

At first, I was dismayed by what immediately struck me. The five top-selling titles granted a graphic box at the top of each week's list almost exclusively featured male authors. Then, in recent months, women authors started appearing, often with literary fiction and nonfiction related to social issues. Their numbers increased when the Oprah Winfrey book club featured titles written by women on lifestyle issues.

In this way, the integrated, undiscriminating *USA Today* bestseller list illustrates trends authors hear about. Wonder why some agents are giving up handling fiction for nonfiction? Look at the nonfiction titles' profusion and staying power on the list.

Celebrity and movie tie-in books killing off "real" writers' careers these days? Look at how many celebrity or notoriety-based books dominate the list. Take the O.J. phenomenon. *Please!*

Heard recently on one of the TV news feature shows that R.L. Stine's phenomenal grip on bestsellerdom—three million books a month—is slipping? The 1996 *USA Today* 150 lists show a definite down trend. (Don't weep for Stine; he's not dead yet. Besides, he's had a run equal to the lifetime records of several bestselling authors.)

Speaking of bestselling authors, who's doing what? Here's an informal roundup.

King is still King, thanks to innovative marketing of *The Green Mile*. R. L. Stine made the list more frequently, but not at Kingly heights and length. Yet by sheer numbers of books he crowned King on the top five bestselling authors list. Although the horror category died in 1989, when midlist authors and entire lines collapsed, horror remains king of the genres in bestseller sales, but only among the few, like King, Stine, and Rice.

Mysteries peak between 30-60, with the exception of mega-bestsellers like Grisham, Clark, Cornwell, and Kellerman. NINC member Diane Mott Davidson's popular

Romance Top 5

1. *The Cove*,
Catherine Coulter
2. *Daring to Dream*,
Nora Roberts
3. *Home Song*,
LaVyrle Spencer
4. *For the Roses*,
Julie Garwood
5. *True Betrayals*,
Nora Roberts

culinary mysteries are eating their way up the list: 10 weeks for *Killer Pancake*.

Danielle Steel's fist-like grip still dominates the velvet glove of romance bestsellerdom, but Novelists, Inc. members are challenging the Queen in terms of enduring on the list, particularly Sandra Brown (*The Witness*, 14 weeks) and Catherine Coulter (*The Cove*, 13 weeks). Tami Hoag came up fast with 11 weeks for *Night Sins*, and a similar, almost simultaneous run for its sequel, *Guilty as Sin*. Sandra Brown's *Exclusive* lasted 10 weeks. Many other members' books performed almost as spectacularly.

A recent phenomenon that the *USA Today* list chronicles is the high performance of backlist titles by newer best-selling authors. This trend is particularly strong among category romance authors who have crossed into mainstream women's fiction or mainstream romantic suspense. Nora Roberts had an astounding 12 titles on the list in the past year. Debbie Macomber had seven; Sandra Brown, six; and Linda Howard, five.

Male-written romance in the form of another *Bridges of Madison County*, *The Horse Whisperer*, vaulted to 22 weeks on the list.

Novelists, Inc. members who write for Harlequin/Silhouette category romance lines are seeing their names on an all-genre best-seller list for the first time. The *USA Today* list doesn't exclude category romance novels, as established, "prestigious" lists usually did.

That's been the best part of the year I followed the list for *NINK*. While most publishers are aware of the list and notify their authors who appear on it, some authors were surprised to find they'd made the list. And ecstatic. Such appearances are, after all, visible signs of progress in a career that is incredibly demanding, with the odds unbelievably stacked against writers.

If members want to track the list of 150 themselves, they can print it off the *USA Today* Internet homepage. (To save paper and storage space, I usually reduce the type size on my browser to print the multi-page list.) To subscribe to a mailed version for \$150, fax your request to (703) 276-6580.

How can writers count the ways the *USA Today* bestseller list tells us tales of publishing out of school?

I used colored highlighters to mark various book categories: orange for mystery/thriller, pink for romance, blue

for science fiction, green for horror, lavender for fantasy, yellow for Novelists, Inc. members (added to the primary category color). I omitted breakout bestsellers (other than those by members) no matter the apparent genre affiliation; to me, they're a different breed of cat that should be tracked as a separate category.

Other trackers may favor different categories, memoirs or classic reissues (like the Jane Austen books), movie tie-in titles, or nonfiction family-issue books.

USA Today's brief year-end summaries of top-selling books and authors, across the board and by category, are also worth study. On the 1996 Top 100 list, Grisham and Gray (*Men Are From Mars*, etc.) take the first three slots. King dominates the first 26 spots. Stine enters at number 35, Cornwell and Clark at 38 and 39, Rice at 61, Koontz at 66, Steel at 80. Lots of nonfiction authors interlard the tale-spinners.

The Oprah Winfrey influence is manifest. The first title by a woman on the Top 100 list is Oprah's *Make The Connection* (co-written with Bob Greene) at number 11. An Oprah-recommended book, *Simple Abundance* by Sarah Ban Breathnach is #14; another Oprah-endorsed book, Jacqueline Mitchard's *The Deep End of The Ocean*, is #29. In 1995, I recall—B.O. (Before Oprah)—the highest ranking title by a woman was Dr. Laura Schlessinger's *Ten Stupid Things Women Do* at #26 (a demeaning title and low position that literally made me cringe).

In top-five categories, Catherine Coulter, Nora Roberts (two appearances), LaVyrle Spencer, and Julie Garwood capture the romance crown. In science fiction and fantasy, Robert Jordan leads movie tie-in/series novels (*Star Wars* and *Invasion*) in the fortunate five, with one woman author, Diane Carey, among them. There is no mystery breakdown.

The list's top 1996 authors show the male domination in both fiction and nonfiction I noted in the top five graphic for so many months: R. L. Stine, Stephen King, John Grisham, Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, and John Gray.

So. Knowledge is power.

Not really. What we do with knowledge is power. Do we as fiction writers tailor our work to bestseller lists? Some will say no. Others will insist that we must be aware of what's selling.

Certainly, freelance writers need to keep their fingers on the pulse of the day's social concerns and trends when they're not tapping the keyboard. And I personally believe that they must make themselves the masters of > > >

SF/Fantasy Top 5

- 1. *A Crown of Swords*,
Robert Jordan**
- 2. *Star Wars: Before the Storm*,
Michael P. Kube-McDowell**
- 3. *Star Wars: Shield of Lies*,
Michael P. Kube-McDowell**
- 4. *Invasion Book One: First Strike*,
Diane Carey**
- 5. *Star Wars: X-Wing Rogue Squadron*,
Michael A. Stackpole**

Bestseller Map...

(Continued from page 5)

their corporate careers, the captains of their literary souls.

I had one of those spontaneously bestselling fluke books in 1982, the year *USA Today* was founded. Had the 1993 list been available then, I might have understood just how fantastically well it and the sequel were doing, and reacted. Instead, I assumed my editor/publisher would be pleased and would push forward. The editor/publisher failed to follow up on my "surprise" bestsellers (some publishers hate surprises more than they love success), and the bookselling climate that permitted my two novels to leap out of the crowd is now gone for-

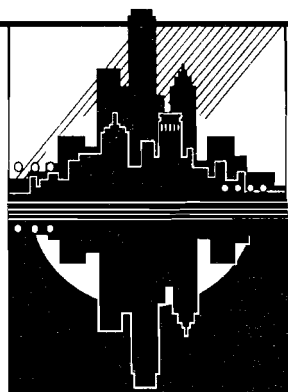
ever, for me and for all authors.

Any bestseller list is only a log of a present that is quickly becoming the past, but, read right, it can become a map of the future.

The very breadth and untidy democracy of an unorchestrated list like *USA Today's* makes it more honest and a truer thermometer of trends, not a mere record of publishing power.

With it, authors are free to interpret the tracings of the tea leaves as we will. And now we can at least, and at last, read some of them for ourselves. **NINK**

Carol Nelson Douglas is the author of 34 mystery, fantasy, science fiction, historical and contemporary romance, and mainstream women's fiction novels. Her seventh Midnight Louie mystery, Cat in a Flamingo Fedora, is a May '97 release from Forge.



The Facts of Life, The Universe, and New York City....

Although our new professional conference planner (a native New Yorker) notes that prior to hiring her, NINC had already obtained what she considers an extremely favorable hotel contract (for New York City, that is), being in New York is nonetheless going to cost NINC a lot of money. And that, in a nutshell, is why it's going to cost attendees a lot of money.

Before you start throwing rotten vegetables and calling me mean names, let me hasten to point out that you—i.e. the members—voted to have the conference in New York City. (Okay, I voted for it, too, but I'm just one person and I refuse to take the blame.)

And, hey, kids—it's going to be a *GREAT* conference! Just an expensive one. And trust me when I say *GREAT*, because—just ask around if you don't believe me—nobody likes a good time more than I do. Not even Coulter.

Let me also assure you that this is still a non-profit conference. Indeed, the Board of Directors, entrusted with responsibly guarding your treasury, is starting to nervously

ask me just *how* non-profitable we can expect this year's conference to be. Well... Considering (just for one example) that our catering costs this year will be approximately 150% higher than last year's catering costs, but we're only raising the conference fee by about 50%, I think it's fair to say that I may be going for an all-time record of just how non-profitable a NINC conference can get! (But I don't want to brag.)

So, although I know that this year's \$295 conference fee may be a significant stretch for some members' budgets, I'm afraid that that's the price of having the conference right in the heart of New York City—where we're going to have the most exciting, best-attended, most stimulating NINC conference ever!

And if that doesn't satisfy you, then I know a *terrific* little hotel in Tanzania. Reasonable prices, decent food, occasional hot water, and a good view of Kilimanjaro when the mist clears. However, I've never seen an editor there....

— **Laura Resnick**
Conference Coordinator

As Rabbi Zola used to say to us: better you should hear about this from me than that you should pick it up in the streets.

If you've already eagerly opened and examined your 1997 NINC Preliminary Conference Brochure, conveniently tucked into this month's issue of *NINK*, then you already know that this year's conference will be the most expensive we've ever had. (And if you haven't, then you are probably at this very moment tossing aside this article to take a hard look at your preliminary brochure. Don't worry; I'll be here when you get back.)

Since I expect to encounter distress, outrage, price resistance, and possibly even threats of violence (and that's just from the people who *like* me, never mind the rest of you) for having set such a high price, I think it well worth taking this opportunity to discuss why this year's conference fee is going to be \$100 more than last year's.

Electronic Rights: What's It Like Out There?

By
LAWRENCE WATT-EVANS

So you've sold a novel, and the contract arrives, and you look through it and see that the publisher expects you to sign over all electronic rights. Just what does that mean?

Good question. The biggest single problem in explaining the current situation in "electronic rights" is that nobody knows exactly what that term means—not even the people who buy and use them! In fact, the term "electronic rights" is *deliberately* vague. It was created to include just about anything new, including things that haven't been invented yet.

Theoretically, "electronic rights" should mean any form of electromagnetic information storage or delivery. This ought to include audio and video rights, but so far as I know, nobody actually uses it that way. What it really seems to mean is *computer* rights—any form of information storage or delivery that uses a computer.

Let me explain what I mean by that. "Information storage" means exactly what it says; it's not anything specific to computers or electronics. Books are a form of information storage. Radio is a form of information delivery. Electronic gadgets, be they computers or whatever, are just new ways of doing the same old things people have always done—getting words, sounds, and images from one person to another.

To computer folks, those words, sounds, and images are "content," and writers, artists, musicians, and the like are "content providers."

Right now, there are dozens of new ways of delivering information—CD-ROMs, diskettes, networks—and the manufacturers are looking for content to deliver, content that they can sell.

So far, they haven't been very successful with traditional fiction, but publishers are convinced that sooner or later someone is going to find a way to sell stories on computers, and they want to be ready when it happens. That's why they try to obtain electronic rights to as much as possible as cheaply as possible, so they'll be ready with that content when someone finally figures out how to sell it.

There are two basic ways to deliver content to someone's computer. One is as a recording—a diskette, CD, CD-ROM, tape, or other physical object with the information recorded on it. The other is as pure information delivered directly from another computer over a network. A network is anything that connects two or more computers; networks range from LANs (Local-Area Networks) with just two or three machines on them, up to the Internet, which connects thousands, perhaps millions of

computers all over the world.

This article is primarily concerned with network rights. In practice, this usually means the right to put something on the Internet, since that's the network that reaches far and away the most people. Before we get to the specifics of the Internet, though, a few basic points.

It's easy to just put a story on a computer screen. Take the text of a book, put it in a file, and anyone with a computer can read it. The average novel can fit on a standard 3.5" diskette, so it would seem obvious and natural that someone would try selling novels that way. It *has* been tried, but it hasn't worked, mostly for two reasons:

First, computer files can be copied very, very easily; attempts at copy protection or encryption have all failed, since anything one computer programmer can do, another can undo. Authors and publishers are not happy with the idea of selling novels that can be copied perfectly in five minutes at a cost of just 39¢ (or less!) for a blank diskette.

Second, and more importantly, readers don't want to read plain text from a computer screen. It's not much fun.

You can't read a computer screen easily while lying in bed, or on the beach. Books don't need batteries or power cords. A printed page is easier on the eyes than most computer displays. If you ruin a book by dropping it while reading in the bathtub, or lose it by leaving it on the bus, you're out five or six bucks; do that with a laptop and it's a couple of grand.

Computer developers have been looking for ways to get past these problems. So far, they haven't been entirely successful, but they're making progress. Since computerized books aren't as convenient as traditional books in some ways, one approach is to find ways in which they're *more* convenient.

With a book or diskette or CD you need to go to the store, pick it out, buy it, bring it home, and load it into your computer. Delivering a novel over a phone line, so that the reader doesn't need to go to the bookstore at all, is one way to increase convenience. And the way to do *that* is to put the novel on the Internet. With a story on the Internet, you never need to leave your chair—you can tell your computer to fetch it for you while you play Freecell or Minesweeper.

Until the 1990s, the Internet was the domain of scientists and techies of various sorts—college students, engineers, programmers, and so on. With the advent of the World Wide Web in 1992, that began to change. The Web makes using the Internet easy. Changes in >>>

**You never need
leave your chair
—you can tell
your computer to
fetch [a story]
for you.**

Electronic Rights

regulations governing Internet access providers have made it easy to get hooked up to the Web. There are now millions of people browsing the Web regularly.

While it might be possible to publish fiction on the older parts of the Internet, by FTP (File Transfer Protocol), or through e-mail, or on Usenet, it hasn't been practical yet. On the Web it's not just practical, it's happening. You can put *anything* on a Web page, and connect it up to anything else on the Web. You can put pictures of your family dog, samples of the music you play in the garage with your buddies, the essay you wrote in the fifth grade. You can link from your own page to the Louvre, the IRS, Paramount's Star Trek page, anything—links don't need any sort of connection on the other end. (It's polite to ask before linking to someone else's page, but it's not necessary.)

And yes, this means you can put stories on the World Wide Web. People do. There are already dozens, maybe hundreds, of "e-zines," electronic "magazines," out there. Almost none of them actually pay for what they publish, though.

Yes, it's publishing. That's been established. If you put a story on the Web, it's *published*. Keep that in mind before allowing anything on a network!

But just because you post something on the Web, that doesn't mean anyone is going to *see* it. There are more than sixteen *million* Web pages, including sites for everything from giant corporations and national governments to kids telling stories about their pets. Every day millions of people "surf the Net," but the vast majority of them are never going to look at an e-zine. Microsoft's site gets tens of thousands of "hits" every day; my own Web page is lucky to get twenty hits a day, and I'm doing better than many.

With all that huge network in place, all those millions of people using it, businesses and entrepreneurs around the world have looked at it and said, "There has to be some way to make money off this." They're trying to find some way to turn those people into customers. So far, nobody's

found a reliable way to do it.

The obvious approach is to put something on the Web that people want, and charge them to use it. So far, this hasn't generally worked; it's the equivalent of pay-per-view TV, where you need something very special to make people cough up money. Charge

Publishers are convinced that sooner or later someone is going to find a way to sell stories on computers.

cards can be used over e-mail, but convincing people to pay hasn't been easy. The most successful pay-for-access sites appear to be the ones selling pornographic pictures; typically they'll have a few mildly racy pictures to lure you in, then offer to sell you an access code that will let you see the "good stuff."

There's been at least one attempt to set up something

similar for fiction. Ken Jenks created Mind's Eye Fiction, a Website where you can find dozens of stories, each one divided into two pages. (Note that on the Web, where no paper is involved, a page can be as long or as short as you like.) Originally, you could read the first page for free; to get to the second page and read the end of the story, you paid a small fee by any of several methods.

This was not a rousing success. A few people went ahead and paid, but most netsurfers came, looked, said, "Why should I pay?" and clicked away to somewhere else—perhaps one of the free-to-all e-zines.

Does this mean that fiction on the Web isn't a viable proposition? Not at all. After all, people don't pay to watch network television, but that's profitable—because the networks sell advertising.

So far, advertising appears to be the best path to making money from the World Wide Web. The IBM/Sears on-line network Prodigy was the first place this was tried. Advertising failed there for several reasons; it seems to be doing better on the Web. Any site that has a high enough "hit count" can sell advertising space—look at that page and you'll find whatever you were looking for, but you'll also see a small advertisement for whoever the current sponsor is. Most search engines, the devices that help you find what you're looking for among those sixteen million Web pages, now run ads at the top; some even choose what ad to show you based on what you search for. As an example, I recently used the Infoseek search engine to find information on the Sony Bookman. I don't think it was a coincidence that after I made my request, an ad for Sony appeared at the top of the Infoseek page.

Mind's Eye Fiction picked up on this—now, if you want to see the rest of a story you've started, you have a choice: pay, or agree to look at an ad. More people choose the ad, which is hardly surprising.

There are also sites that offer subscriptions—pay so much a month or a year and you receive a password that gives you access to whatever articles or stories are available. Mind's Eye offers a version of this, too, where you can set up an account and use up the credit in it to read stories.

And then there are sites with no visible means of support, sites that are kept alive by outside resources on the theory that someday they'll find a way to charge for their services. Several magazines and newspapers have on-line editions that operate this way; so far these are mostly nonfiction.

So where do these Websites get their content, and how do they pay for it?

Mind's Eye buys rights directly from the author and mostly uses reprints. Payment is entirely royalties, no

Authors and publishers are not happy with the idea of selling novels that can be copied perfectly in five minutes at a cost of just 39¢ (or less!).

Electronic Rights

advance—but the royalties are 75% of the net proceeds! Even at that percentage, however, the actual amounts are still very small.

Several e-zines obtain rights directly from the author and simply don't pay anything—they are, in effect, “fanzines,” amateur productions. Others pay tiny sums, fractions of a cent per word, apparently out of the editor/publisher's own pocket.

Websites that are affiliated with print magazines generally use material purchased for the print version—and this can get messy. On several occasions publishers have posted material they did not actually own the appropriate rights to. So far, whenever this has been discovered the materials have either been removed or paid for, but who knows what's out there undiscovered?

In other cases, some magazines are now demanding electronic rights, or simply *all* rights, to everything they publish, with the intention of putting it on the Web permanently and collecting fees on it forever, without cutting the actual author in for any of the money. While it wouldn't be all that difficult to negotiate fairly for network rights, it's easier to simply try to grab everything.

The *New York Times* has been at the forefront of this movement—and has run into some of the stiffest opposition. Naturally, writers are not happy about giving away all that potential income.

The American Society of Journalists & Authors has been at the forefront of the battle on the authors' side, doing everything it can to provide information and support for writers resisting this sort of inexcusable grabbing of rights. They regularly issue a free electronic report called “ASJA Contracts Watch” that keeps their members and subscribers up to date on what's happening. If you write nonfiction and have access to e-mail, I strongly urge you to subscribe to this report (see box on page 15).

You can put anything on a Web page, and connect it up to anything else on the Web.

So far, however, fiction has been almost ignored. Novels are simply too long to be practical on the Internet with current technology, and short stories are a small niche nowadays. *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* apparently put some stories on the Internet without the

permission of the authors, claiming that this was covered by a contract clause allowing them to reprint stories in overseas editions of the magazine; the authors in question convinced them otherwise. OMNI buys fiction for the Web, and pays very well. Mind's Eye offers royalties that are generous in percentage terms, but so far remain trivial in dollar amounts.

And then there are the pirates.

There have been at least two significant pirate sites posting stories without bothering to inform the authors or ask for permission. One operated out of Canada under the

name Gothic Tales, and used a mix of classic horror and fantasy stories ranging from Edgar Allan Poe to Neil Gaiman; the proprietor seemed to feel that copyright didn't apply on the Internet, and removed the offending stories when she was convinced otherwise. The other is called Axxon, a science fiction e-zine based in Argentina; it appears to have illegally translated *hundreds* of stories into Spanish and posted them without the knowledge or consent of the authors. When some of the authors discovered this, the “editor” protested that he was just trying to help these writers find an audience in Argentina.

This is on the *World Wide Web*, not in Argentina—and Argentina abides by international copyright law in any case, and I doubt Stephen King, to name one of the dozens of authors pirated, feels any need of such publicity.

Unfortunately, there's no way to prevent anyone from setting up such a pirate site—it's become absurdly easy to scan text into a computer and put it on the Web. All we can do is to make sure that when we find such a site, we ignore the protests of innocent intent and make sure it be shut down immediately.

In times to come, as Internet access continues to speed up and people become more accustomed to reading from a screen rather than a page, it may become more practical to post entire novels on the net. At least one company, Alexandria Digital Literature, is already set up to do so; they intend to pay advances and royalties, and as with any publishing contract the details are negotiable. Alexandria, like Mind's Eye, is more interested in reprints than originals so far, and is specifically interested in buying *network* rights—that is, they are not going to buy “all electronic rights,” as they have no intention of producing CD-ROMs or diskette magazines. They'll negotiate as to whether those rights are exclusive or not, as well—in short, the rights are just like publishing rights elsewhere; only the medium is new. Publishers who treat “electronic rights” as a single thing are wrong; electronic rights are just as separable as paper rights.

And finally, for now, it's time to mention the hybridization of book rights and electronic rights, i.e., selling ordinary books over the Internet. There are several operations up and running; the biggest and best is probably Amazon Books, which offers a truly staggering catalog. You order a book by e-mail, pay by credit card, and a few days later the book arrives by ordinary mail; it's like any other catalog operation, except that you read the catalog on the World Wide Web rather than finding it in your stack of junk mail with the gas bill and the letter from Aunt Rose.

So far, the volume for any individual author through Amazon or the other on-line bookstores doesn't >>>

There have been at least two significant pirate sites posting stories without bothering to inform the authors or ask for permission.

E-Rights...

(Continued from page 9)

amount to much, but Amazon's *total* volume is huge. This doesn't involve any new rights; they're simply booksellers.

However, some publishers offer their books for sale on the Web directly, as well, and some of them have tried to claim that these are "special sales," to be accounted at a lower royalty rate. There's no excuse for this. The whole point of a Website is that it's cheap and easy to maintain. A bright teenager can learn to produce Webpages in a day or two, and actually write one in a couple of hours. Yes, big companies are paying Web page designers as much as \$300 an hour, but this is because they don't yet know any better.

And once your page is ready, the upkeep is practically nonexistent; where a bookstore in a shopping mall might easily pay \$3,000 a month in rent, or a direct-mail advertiser might pay \$2,000 to mail out a thousand catalogs, commercial Web space can be had for as little as \$50 a month—perhaps less. There are plenty of ways to get Web space *free*, if one is willing to cut a few corners.

We mustn't let publishers get away with claiming that selling books over the Internet has such high overhead that they can only pay reduced royalties. It's not true. The whole point of the World Wide Web is ease of access.

It's this ease of access that's the great appeal of the Internet. On the Net anyone can be a publisher, anyone

Some publishers [who] offer their books for sale on the Web directly ...claim that these are "special sales," to be accounted at a lower royalty rate. There's no excuse for this.

can advertise anything; you don't need a huge investment in production or distribution.

And the great drawback here is also the ease of access. Why should anyone pay for anything on the nets when there's so much available free? So far, that's kept the Internet from becoming hugely profitable for writers or publishers—or pirates. With millions of users and minimal costs, the *potential* for profit is

obviously immense, but so far no one's found a reliable way to tap that potential.

Until someone does, electronic rights to your stories aren't worth much. When the way is found, however, those rights might be worth a fortune.

That's why publishers ask you to give them away—and that's why you shouldn't. **MNK**

Lawrence Watt-Evans is the Hugo-winning author of some two dozen novels, one hundred short stories, and assorted articles, poems, etc., almost all in the fields of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. His epic fantasy Touched by the Gods will be published by Tor in November. He's been active on-line for about ten years. He is also the former president of the Horror Writers Association, and the creator and maintainer of the HWA Web page and maillist.

The Madonna,

By
WIN BLEVINS

The following is the text of a talk Win Blevins gave at the annual awards banquet of the Mountains & Plains Booksellers in accepting the 1996 fiction award for Stone Song: A Novel of the Life of Crazy Horse, which also won a Spur Award as Best Novel of the West.

Let me tell you a story.

A few years back at a WWA [Western Writers of America] convention, a well-known literary agent asked me in a friendly way, "Tell me, what do you really want?"...as a writer, he meant.

I appreciated the question, so I told him. To write and publish books that are both first-rate and popular, I said, and elaborated a little.

He replied, "Win, you just don't get it. There's literary fiction and entertainment fiction. They don't meet. You're a storyteller. If you try to be something else, you'll fall between two stools."

He went on, "when you and I were young, it wasn't this way. The books the critics liked, the books that got awards, and the books that became best-sellers—they were all the same. We had Hemingway, Faulkner, O'Hara, and James Gould Cozzens." (At least I think that was his short list.) "It's not that way any more."

Recognizing this idea for what it was, the literary fiction-genre fiction distinction, I opted for silence, which I now break. This literary vs. genre stuff is pernicious. It's done a world of harm to contemporary fiction—to writers, publishers, booksellers, and readers.

It's the old madonna and the whore dichotomy. A woman is one or the other. If a madonna, she's impossibly good and we admire the hell out of her but we don't really want to hang around her. If a whore, we don't want to admit we enjoy her company, but late at night....

Thus we carry minimalist tomes in public, and read John D. MacDonald in the wee hours.

Thus bookstore clerks recommend critically admired fiction as literature, and dismiss novels of real excitement with the faint praise, "It's a good read." I've seen that pained expression on a store clerk's face more than once. It comes when I ask where the mysteries are, and it says, "Funny, you look literate."

The result of all this is one very confused reading public.

What's good (or supposed to be good) readers find they don't like. What they like is bad (supposed to be bad). It's all too much like Sunday School, or taking your cod liver

The Whore, and the Decline of Fiction Sales

oil. So they end up saying to hell with novels. Current royalties on fiction are telling lots of writers how many readers are saying to hell with it.

This distinction between literary and genre fiction is also false. But before getting to that, let's ask how we ended up here.

The perfessers did it. With the help of their progeny, the critics.

A generation ago, somehow, we started letting English academics tell us what's good and bad in storytelling. Trouble is, they came at it like blind men.

A person reading a story, or listening to one or watching one, needs to have all his faculties about him—senses, imagination, love of play, love of humor, intellect, emotions, creativity—he needs to be a whole person and to receive the story as a whole person.

Perfessers and critics observing a creative act are eunuchs at an orgy.

English perfessers are trained to come at things with the intellect alone. I know, I got the training in several graduate schools. Took ten years to get it and twenty to get rid of it.

You can't smell flowers with your hair, you can't hear an orchestra with your tongue, and you can't bring story into your embrace with intellect alone. It is too subtle for that. An intellectual reading a great novel is the proverbial blind man feeling an elephant's leg and judging the creature to be a tree.

Perfessers and critics observing a creative act are eunuchs at an orgy.

Let us reclaim our souls from these people. Let us read with our hearts and our whole beings and know without being lectured what a wonder and a glory a story can be. Let us write stories with those hearts and whole beings.

Let us as an industry, as people writing, publishing, and selling books, throw the perfessers distinction out the window. And then have a helluva party. And then sell some books again.

This is liberating the ancient and honorable art of storytelling from the academic pillory.

I wear a tee shirt from the 1992 WWA convention in Jackson that declares on one side, MEMBER OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST PROFESSION, and on the other, STORYTELLER.

I believe that even before human beings figured out fire, they stood around trees burning from lightning strikes late into the night and traded stories. I believe they huddled in caves and told stories. Stories got them through the long, long Arctic winters.

What did stories do for these people? What human

need did they serve, a need so strong that we told tales from the beginning of the beginnings?

Stories showed them how to be human beings. How to be mothers, how to be sons, how to be hunters, healers, lovers, grandparents. Stories helped them know what loyalty feels like, and treachery, triumph, sacrifice, rivalry, hatred, and above all love.

Stories showed them how to be young, how to rise to the prime of life, how to be old, how to die. Stories showed them how to find God within and God without.

The stories our ancestors told were not contrived for college graduates, or any intellectual or other elite. These stories offered something to children, to the aged, to the leaders, to the followers, to everyone.

I am saddened by the current attitude that a difficult story, one only a few people can get, is somehow a better story than one everyone loves. I celebrate stories that resonate in all human hearts—not cheap, lowest-common-denominator stories, but truly universal tales. I call for other writers, for publishers, for booksellers, for our entire culture to celebrate them.

We have the needs of our ancestors. From the age we understand language at all, our cry is, "Tell me a story." (Did you ever hear a child beg, "Daddy, give me a lecture?")

I am a lover of story. A teller of stories. A listener to stories. Through story I feel connected to all my ancestors, particularly those who were themselves storytellers. Through story I feel connected to my contemporaries telling tales in books, magazines, movies, television, music and every other medium, and to all lovers of these arts. Through story I feel connected to all our descendants. I am honored to be part of a great human endeavor, storytelling.

For me the first words of this talk are a sacred invocation: Let me tell you a story. **NINK**

« Words To Write By »

I tell a story that begins on page 1. From that point on, my aim is not to let you put it down. I want you to turn every page. I want you to stay up until 3 a.m. Patrick White has never attempted that in his life; neither has Nadine Gordimer. They are beautiful writers, better educated than I am, better writers than I could ever be. But they are not storytellers....

There are a lot of good writers; there are not many good storytellers.

Jeffrey Archer, as quoted by D.C. Denison in The Boston Globe Magazine



How I WRITE

By BARBARA KEILER

Editor's Note: Barbara made the mistake of suggesting that an occasional column by writers on "How I Write" would be of interest to NINC members. We liked the idea and are planning on running the column every other month, beginning with—Ta Da!—Barbara Keiler!

You've heard the speeches, I'm sure. You've read the books. You've attended the workshops and seminars. You know what it takes to succeed as a novelist: focus, organization, the discipline to start each day by planting your butt in your chair and applying your fingers to the computer keyboard.

Well, allow me to stand before you and say, "Hi. My name is Barbara, and I'm unfocused, undisciplined, and disorganized."

I'm not looking for a twelve-step program, though. I don't want to be cured. I have learned that my ability to maintain a successful writing career bears no relation to my ability to plant my butt in a chair.

Here is my day: I clear my husband and kids out of the house, and then I lounge at the kitchen table with a mug of black coffee and the *New York Times*. I take at least an hour with the paper, refilling my mug, scanning the news stories, swearing at the editorials, and searching for interesting items that might spark a plot or character idea. I do the crossword puzzle, in ink. (Always ink, and always using the same pen. That's as close to organized and disciplined as I get.)

I wash and dress, then run errands. With two sons in early adolescence, I do an enormous amount of grocery shopping. On those rare mornings when I don't have to replenish the household food supply, I stop at the post office, the office supply store, or the local bookstore. Or I drive to Emerson Hospital for physical therapy, where smiling young women who think it's so neat that I've actually written a novel ("Have I heard of you?" they always ask) perform sadistic acts on various damaged and deteriorating parts of my body. I return home—it's about ten-thirty or eleven now—and spend an hour reviewing my e-mail and responding to posts I've downloaded from the computer network to which I subscribe. By around noon, I'm done with that, which means it's time for lunch.

(I know what you're thinking: Keiler, half the day is gone and you haven't written squat! Bear with me. It gets worse.)

During lunch, I consume the *Boston Globe*, front page to last. It's less highbrow than the *New York Times*,

which means I've got a greater chance of stumbling upon an intriguing human-interest story that might work in a book. I read Ann Landers and Miss Manners. I read all the comic strips except "Spider Man." I read the TV listings. Ideas for stories lurk in the blurbs.

It's now about one-thirty. I climb the stairs to my office, click into Microsoft Word, and peruse what I wrote yesterday, editing as I go. That brings me to two-thirty, at which time my boys arrive home from school.

(Keiler! You're thinking. *Two-thirty and you haven't written a blasted paragraph!*)

The kids enthusiastically devour most of the food I purchased that morning, all the while yammering about who punched whom on the bus, who's a dweeb, and who likes the gym teacher (no one, apparently). By three o'clock they're doing their homework, and I'm back at my desk.

And then the words come. They flow. They gush. They hemorrhage. By five-thirty, I will have written a good two thousand words.

I leave my desk long enough to have dinner with my family. I sweat for a half-hour on the exercycle, shower, and then, as often as not, return to my desk and hemorrhage some more. Another five hundred to a thousand words might pour out before *Chicago Hope* or *Homicide: Life on the Streets* begins. If more words accumulate inside me during that hour of TV time, I will go back to my desk afterward and write until I'm ready to crash.

Disciplined? Organized?

Who, me?

But it works. It's worked for sixty-one novels so far—more if you count the books I wrote that haven't sold.

Mine are the sort of work habits that give writers a bad reputation. They make me seem like some sort of flaming *artiste*, ditzing around in limbo until the muse invites me to do the macarena with her. And I'm not an *artiste*. I'm really a professional. I swear.

I just don't do that nine-to-five, butt-in-the-chair thing very well. God help me if I ever had to get a *real* job.

The author of more than sixty novels, Barbara Keiler writes for Harlequin Books under the pen name Judith Arnold. Her current release is a novella (Rich Man, Poor Man) in the Harlequin anthology, "How to Marry a Millionaire" (April). She will also have books out in September, November, and December '97 and January '98.



I'll start this month's column off with what was late-breaking news at the start of March (but may be old stuff to some of you by now).

NINC is no longer offering home pages to the home-pageless, due to problems with the designer and low demand. However, we're still eager to link your home pages to the NINC site. Just e-mail your URL to ninc@lightst.com (Eileen Buckholtz) to have it linked. Also, for those who still need a home page, NINC will still rent space on the Website (cheap!) Contact Jennifer Blake (PAMrJB@aol.com) to make arrangements.

For those still hunting for cheap Internet access, you may want to check out USFreeway, which purports to be supported entirely by advertising. (Like Juno, but with complete Internet access instead of just e-mail.) There's a one-time registration fee of \$25 (as of this writing) but no charges after that. For more info or to sign up, visit their web site at <http://www.usfreeway.com> or call them at 1-888-USFRWAY. Another web site of interest is the *New York Times* book page, which lists the top 30 NYT best-sellers. You have to subscribe to enter (which includes filling out a form), but the subscription is free. That's at <http://www.nytimes.com/books/home>

There's been so much great stuff on Ninclink over the past month that I don't know where to start. I could easily fill this column every month just with recaps of the best tidbits off of that listserv. (If that's what you'd like, let me know!) Recently, we've discussed topics like brainstorming techniques, definitions of literary vs popular fiction, libraries' policies on paperbacks and older books, getting kids to read, booksignings from hell (including some hilarious anecdotes!), fantasy classifications or "subgenres," bad reviews, writers-in-residence, and "ethnic" books and characters (especially by non-ethnic authors).

The writer's block topic revived, with more wonderful suggestions and insights, to include another recommended book: *Solved by Sunset*, by Carol Orsborne. A couple of other items you may find of particular interest: Dorothy Dunnnett's books are due to be reissued by Random House/Vintage starting in May. And Mary Jo Putney shared info about a wonderful service called Eureka! Booksearch in Philadelphia. Their searches are free, with no obligation to buy, and you can return any books if you're not satisfied. I plan to give them a try! Their number is 1-800-563-1222.

I must say we have a lot of fun on Ninclink, even when discussing arcane bits of research. Here's a hilarious example, from Harriet Pilger: "Now for all you serious historical researchers out there: Saturday's *Washington Post* reports on a new book coming out that details the noxious truths about history (*Smelly Old History* by Mary Dobson, Oxford Press—it is a Scratch 'n' Sniff, and I'm not kidding!) The article mentions these historical tidbits: [BARF ALERT! QUFASY STOMACHS SCROLL DOWN NOW!] The Romans washed their linen in urine which was believed to have medicinal properties; the Dutch brushed their teeth with urine; and the clear winner—16th century women "pressed peeled apples to their sweaty armpits then passed the gifts along to their lovers." (I asked my dh if he thought this was what was missing from our relationship and he thought not.) Now here's the deal: the first one of you historical types who works the apple thing into a scene between hero and heroine gets a prize. (An apple!)

See what you're missing if you're not subscribed? (Or did I just scare everyone off?) <g> Remember, 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) below that. Ninclink, by the way, is now up to 198 subscribers, well over a third of NINC membership.

Don't forget to send me (brendahb@aol.com) your online-related news! See you online!

— Brenda Hiatt Barber :

FYI: RWA has finally started their own listservs—one for all RWA members (RWAlink) and one for PAN members (PANlink). Already, this has eliminated most discussion on Ninclink of any RWA/PAN business, which leaves more room for other great stuff. To subscribe to the above lists (if you're an RWA or PAN member), send an e-mail to: majordomo@major-domo.pobox.com with "info rwalink" or "info panlink" (no quotes) in the body of the e-mail. That will get you the current subscription info and list protocols. RWA members may also want to link their home pages to RWA's. To do that, e-mail your URL to Janis Reams Hudson (reams.hudson@re-mail.com).





EAST OF THE HUDSON

Small, Small World

One of the bright spots for writers in the past few years has been the explosion of foreign markets for commercial fiction. "World rights" is a phrase that has new meaning. Take, in my own case, *All the Winters that Have Been*, a book that was written a couple of years ago for a nice advance, the kind of money that can keep a writer going for a year, if his or her tastes are moderate.

Winters sold into six good foreign markets in both Asia and Europe. Some of those sales were valuable, not for their size, but for their precedent. One was in China, where books used to be stolen outright by Chinese-language publishers. Any money, even a dollar, is better than what we used to collect from those pirates. But several other overseas sales were much more lucrative. I had the exquisite pleasure of helping to devalue the yen by fostering a little bidding war between two Japanese publishers. They went back and forth for three rounds and the winner ultimately paid almost as much for Japanese rights as my American publisher did for North American rights.

German and Scandinavian rights were good chunks of change, too. Hell, I even posted my first seven-figure literary deal. Unfortunately, it was in Italian lira, so I haven't been able to retire. When the final tally was made, foreign rights for *Winters* yielded more than American rights did. That's when I started paying attention to foreign rights.

The attention has convinced me that there is a real hunger out there in the rest of the world for American stories. Our landscape seems to have become as fascinating and universal to the rest of the world as it is to us. Our characters and situations translate very handily into universal, or at least global, terms.

But multiculturalism bends back on itself, at times. Take, for instance, the discovery my wife and I made in California last month. Actually, Ann made the discovery, in a supermarket in San Diego, a town of the 21st Century where Spanish is heard almost as frequently as English. There in the book section were a half-dozen copies each of four familiar scarlet covers, our old friends, Silhouette Desires. But they weren't "Desires," they were Deseos, Spanish-language translations printed by Harlequin/Silhouette's Spanish arm, Harlequin Iberica, S.A. in Madrid.

So we've come full circle, in a way. American novels, written in English, are being translated for overseas markets and then being imported back into the United States for sale. Once I looked at the books hard, though, I saw something else. These weren't just a few Spanish-language copies brought in to serve a miniscule market. The covers used models and poses aimed at the Spanish market, but there was an American ISBN number on the back and the price printed on each was \$3.50 U.S. In other words, Harlequin

had printed enough copies to justify a run of new covers for the books.

The multicultural volumes raised a couple of interesting questions. One has to do with foreign-language royalty rates and their applicability to sales that are made in Yankee dollars. Another has to do with rights agreements for foreign language editions in general.

I would ask Harlequin about the matter, but in the past I've always been told that the firm prefers to speak with its authors directly, not through intermediaries. So I guess it's up to any of our members who are Harlequin/Silhouette writers, particularly Desire writers, to inquire about these globe-trotting hybrids. Any takers?

No Such Thing as Free Agency

Our colleagues over at the Authors Guild did a nifty little cautionary feature in the autumn issue of their *Bulletin*. Since the newsletter didn't arrive until winter, I'll risk being late and pass on the gist of the piece, which had to do with "book doctors."

If you hadn't heard, it's getting harder and harder to get a good agent, nowadays. As a matter of fact, it's getting hard to get any kind of agent, unless you are a celebrity or your name is bankable. That situation has generated an interesting little situation, according to author John Blesso. Blesso says that in 1995, he finished his first book and set about finding an agent. Using *Literary Market Place*, he connected with an agent who ostensibly was looking for new clients.

This agent replied to Blesso's submission with a letter finding merit in the manuscript but suggesting it needed a "book doctor," a freelance editor to punch it up where it was low and smooth it out where it was rough. A day or two later, Blesso got another letter, this one from just such a book doctoring service claiming that the Blesso manuscript had been recommended to them and offering to take on the project. No terms were mentioned in this solicitation but they were in later correspondence: up to \$5 a page.

Blesso, who works for the Authors Guild, as well as writing, did a little research in the Guild files and found that book doctors like the one in question were very active: More than 50 queries about the ethics of such operations have been registered with the Guild in the last 18 months. In other words, lots of folks were being queried, probably as the result of their submissions to particular agencies that appear to work in league with the doctors.

Blesso also found in the Guild files an intriguing letter from another doctoring service to a Maine literary agent offering to kick back 15 percent of any fees the doctor collected from clients referred by the agent. "Many of the agents we now get referrals from average many thousands of dollars a year in fees from us..." the editorial miracle worker told the agent.

Now, I spent 15 years as a crime reporter and I always thought I had a pretty nifty nose for scams, but this one was brand new to me. As described by Blesso, bless him, these book doctor services appear to be a more complicated version of the old "reading fee" routine that some literary agencies used to milk wannabe authors. Blesso took an extra step in his exploration. Less than a year after submitting his manuscript to the first doctor, he changed the title, photocopied the next page 13 times. The mildly altered and clearly bogus manuscript was then resubmitted to the doctor.

Back came a glowing letter from the doctor praising the work in question and offering to spruce it up into publishable form.

For a price.

I haven't followed up on all of this, so I have to assume there are respectable reading services and book doctors out there offering legitimate advice and editorial input, just as there may be a few respectable agencies that charge reading fees. But the Association of Authors Representatives no longer extends membership to agents in the latter category, which would make me real wary about using such agents.

Blesso advised prospective patients of book doctors to be careful. Very, very careful. He waved red flags above agencies with reading fees, publishers, or agencies who "specialize" in young or unpublished authors, and operations that do business strictly by mail, i.e. the ones who list no telephone number.

Being the soul of discretion, I wouldn't suggest avoiding such operators completely.

On the other hand, I don't listen to editors' suggestions after they've bought my books. Why the hell would I start paying attention to input from mail-order quacks?

And so far as I'm concerned, five bucks a page is more than I wish to pay for the indignity of having my ms. returned largely unread.

I can do that for free.

— *Evan Maxwell*

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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

Ann Chamberlin, Salt Lake City UT
Patti Cronk (*Patti Standard*), Grand Junction CO
Dénée Cody, Highlands Ranch CO
Leanna Wilson Ellis (*Leanna Wilson*), Irving TX
Eve Graddy, Tyler TX
Chery Griffin (*Victoria Griffin*), Omaha NE
Susan Leslie Liepitz (*Susan Phillips*), Long Beach CA

New Members

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



The Fast Track

Compiled by **MARILYN PAPPANO**

NINC Members on the USA Today List

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	Feb 5	Feb 12	Feb 19	Feb 26
Sandra Brown	<i>Love's Encore</i> , Warner Vision		22n	30	49
Elaine Coffman	<i>If You Love Me</i> , Fawcett	146			
Suzanne Forster	<i>Innocence</i> , Berkley	131			
Tami Hoag	<i>Guilty As Sin</i> , Bantam	12	18	28	27
Linda Howard	<i>Son Of Morning</i> , Pocket			20n	23
Iris Johansen	<i>The Ugly Duckling</i> , Bantam	83	146		
Joan Johnston	<i>After The Kiss</i> , Dell			72n	34
Laura Kinsale	<i>My Sweet Folly</i> , Berkley			74n	78
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Deep Waters</i> , Pocket	70	86		
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Lady's Choice</i> , Mira			66n	56
Susan Elizabeth Phillips	<i>Nobody's Baby But Mine</i> , Avon	60	73		
Patricia Potter	<i>The Scotsman Wore Spurs</i> , Bantam		131n		
Nora Roberts	<i>Holding The Dream</i> , Jove	126			
Nora Roberts	<i>Waiting For Nick</i> , Silhouette		110n	77	

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