

Novelists' Ink

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

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November 1997

Studio Publishing, Part 1 *What Is It? Why Do It?*

This is the first of three articles to address the logical, practical, financial, psychological, and emotional dimensions of studio publishing. To join the NinLink Studio Publishing loop, write Neff Rotter at: neff@sfo.com

By
JULIE TETEL ANDRESEN

The State of the Industry

By the time this article is published, it is possible that the economic conditions in the commercial publishing world which prompted my venture into studio publishing will have changed. It is possible that sales of both hardbacks and paperbacks will have rebounded. It is possible that the big publishers who are now bearing the cost of filling ever-larger retail pipelines will have begun to reap the benefits of the expanding chain superstores. It is possible that all the celebrity books with the mega-buck advances will have earned out in spades and that all the debt the commercial publishers have been servicing for their parent companies will have been wiped out. It is possible that accounting and publicity departments will no longer be understaffed so that authors will be paid on time and their books will receive the kind of marketing attention they need. It is possible that publishers will have increased the percentage authors make from direct market book club sales. It is possible that all productive authors with steady track records and solid readerships (or even just

old-fashioned signed contracts!) who were dropped by their publishers will have been bought back.

Even if all this were to have happened since last summer when I began writing these articles, or even if the turn around were in sight,

not much would change for me now with respect to studio publishing. I would, of course, be happy that this large segment of

the publishing industry was once again enjoying good economic health, and I would be sure to get in on the fun. To a certain extent, the commercial publishing industry is now in a state similar to the American auto industry in the 1980s—and look at Chrysler stock now. Nevertheless, doing business with books has changed in fundamental ways, and it may never be possible for the industry to return to “the good old days”—not that they were ever so good for the majority of writers.

What Is Studio Publishing?

Studio publishing involves a radical redefinition of the relationship between writers and the commercial marketplace on all fronts: technological, economic, and artistic.

On the technologic front, studio publishers use the latest information and computer capabilities to make book production and marketing more efficient. It is therefore a positive response to the negative conditions currently affecting the big commercial publishers who are laboring under old-style publishing industry assumptions and practices.

On the economic front, studio publishers alter the current economic structure of their writing lives by assuming the full costs of producing and marketing their books in order to reap the full rewards of their sales. The improved efficiency provided by the new information technologies make it possible for studio publishers—particularly those with years of experience in the commercial marketplace—to make minimal investments in their writing careers now that will have long-term payoffs, especially if it means that they can rearrange their financial lives so that they are not dependent on exploitatively low advances from commercial publishers and slow-to-never-arriving royalties.

On the artistic front, studio publishers redefine or, rather, *refine* their relationship with their writing and their readers by not only pursuing (continued on page 4)

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

FREE MONEY: We have just received word that NINC will be receiving about \$11,000 from the Author's Coalition. For those of you new to the organization, the Author's Coalition is comprised of 13 writers' organizations that joined together for the purpose of distributing reprographic monies from European Countries.

The copyright laws in those countries are different from those in the US, and photocopying is permitted there so long as a royalty is paid. Obviously, discovering to whom each and every royalty fee is owed is a gigantic task, and not all the money can be properly assigned. These undesignated funds amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars each year, and the countries involved wanted them to go to authors.

Since they couldn't go to specific authors, it was decided to distribute them to organizations who represent authors so they could be used to benefit authors in general. NINC will now be deciding how to use these funds to your benefit.

We are already using the funds from the previous year to pay for the Lottery Audit, and we regularly designate these funds to pay the authors of NINK articles and columns. In previous years we used the funds to publish the *Guide to Agents*. If you have an idea for an expensive project, this is the time to suggest it—and please do.

NOT ANOTHER SURVEY: Each year when we send out our dues renewal forms (which will be coming soon!), we also include the Author's Coalition Survey form. This survey must be taken every year so that the Coalition knows what percentages of our members are published in each field. Then the reprographic monies are divided according to how many members we have who are published in each area.

The more people who respond, the more accurate our figures are, and since these figures are used to determine how much our share of the reprographic funds is, we're most anxious to hear from each and every member. So please take a moment to fill out your survey form before renewing your membership.

ANOTHER GREAT CONFERENCE: As I am writing this, the NINC conference in New York has not yet taken place, but I can tell you one thing with perfect confidence: It's going to be great. And I can tell you another thing with perfect accuracy: Our conference coordinator, Laura Resnick, performed like a pro.

It would take two president's columns to tell you all the disasters with which Laura has dealt these past few months, all the way from having a keynote speaker back out at the very beginning to having a group of presenters back out at the very end (and then the group she got to replace them backed out and... well, you get the idea).

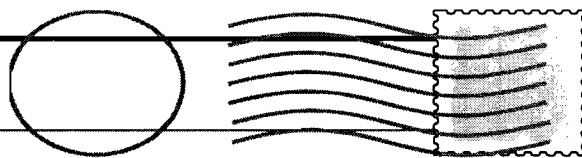
This isn't even mentioning the hotel that insisted on telling our members the hotel was booked solid when our entire block of rooms was unfilled. I wish we could reward Laura as she deserves for the work she did making this our most exciting conference ever, but we can't. I hope she will at least accept our deepest gratitude. Good job, Laura!

—Victoria Thompson

**This Month
from the
President:**

*Free money
...how we get
it...but only if
you help!*

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.

Why Kick a Writer When She's Down?

I was deeply dismayed by Evan Maxwell's brutal and sarcastic attack on Janet Dailey in the latest issue of our newsletter [September NINK]. Of course what she did was wrong, I'm not disputing that, but can't we cut her just a little slack?

When I first started writing, Janet was the only North American writer writing for Mills and Boon. As the romance novel started and continued its phenomenal rise to success, she not only turned out books at an amazing speed, but she took time out from her hectic schedule to travel all over the country to speak at writing conferences

where her presence was a huge drawing card. All the romance writers wanted her and made demands on her time which she generously supplied.

I don't know Janet personally, but I've met her several times and she was always friendly and encouraging. I'm wondering why Mr. Maxwell is so unwilling to believe that the personal tragedies in her life could have taken a toll on both her mental and physical health. (The crack about "the pregnancy of her dog" was especially spiteful and unnecessary.)

Also, if she is a "fading star" who "lost her core audience a long time ago" why would a couple of New York's biggest and most respected publishing houses throw "wads of money" at her to get her to sign a contract for a book that had no reader interest? Doesn't sound like my publisher!

Anyone who has ever met Nora Roberts knows she is a warm, charming, and immensely talented woman, and to the best of my knowledge she is handling this unsavory affair with her usual grace and dignity. Wouldn't it behoove the rest of us to do likewise?

Janet Dailey's health is broken, her reputation is besmirched, and her career is probably irreparably damaged. Was it really necessary to kick her when she was already down?

— **Phyllis Halldorson**

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 NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

New Applicants

Carolyn Brubaker (*Carolyn Lampman*), Riverton WY
Helen Cavanagh, Marco Island FL
Maureen Caudill (*Marissa Hall, Chloe Hall*), San Diego CA
Carol Caverly, Colorado Springs CO
Megan Chance, Poulsbo WA
Lynn Kerstan, San Diego CA
Martha S. O'Connor (*Martha Schroeder*), Wayne PA
Heather Graham Pozzessere (*Heather Graham, Shannon Drake*), Coral Gables FL
Ron Sarti, Dayton OH
David J. Walker, Wilmette IL
Cindy Harris Williams (*Bess Willingham*), Metairie LA

New Members

Nora DeLoach, Decatur GA

Gin Ellis (*Lyn Ellis*), Atlanta GA
Teresa Hill (*Sally Tyler Hayes*), Greenville SC
Margaret E. Hubbard (*Lynn Emery*), Baton Rouge LA
Catherine Hudgins (*Kate Thomas*), San Antonio TX
Martha Johnson, Bloomsburg PA
Jill Jones, Black Mountain NC
Sarah Lovett, Santa Fe NM
Harold A. Lowry (*Leigh Greenwood*), Charlotte NC
Jenny Lykins, Germantown TN
Ardath Mayhar (*Frances Hurst, John Killdeer, Frank Cannon*), Chireno TX
Jan L. Nowasky (*Lorraine Heath*), Plano TX
Debbi Quattrone (*Debbi Rawlins*), Durham NC
Francine Rivers, Windsor CA
Susan D. Runde (*Christine Scott*), Ballwin MO
Kathleen Sage, Teutopolis IL
Sharon Sala (*Dinah McCall*), Shawnee OK
Sharon Schulze, Oakville CT
Ann Howard White, Demorest GA
Terri Lynn Wilhelm (*Terri Lynn, Terri Lindsey*), Casselberry FL
Geraldyn Dawson Williams (*Geraldyn Dawson*), Ft. Worth TX

Studio Publishing

(Continued from page 1)

their individual visions, but also responding directly to their readers' desires without having to accommodate editorial decisions that are, at present, based solely on maximizing the commercial publishers' bottom lines.

When undertaken by multi-published authors with 10, 15, 20, and 50+ books to their credit, studio publishing is something other than vanity press publishing. It is distinct,

as well, from small press publishing, which specializes in non-fiction. (Only 1 in 20 books from small presses is fiction.) It is also not—at the moment, anyway—electronic publishing.

The new technologies have given authors the ability to control the production and distribution of their own work for the first time since Gutenberg. It used to be that authors needed publishers because the publishers owned the printing presses. Now all authors have direct access to print technology without having to go through a publisher to produce a book. It used to be the case that

authors needed publishers because the publishers made sure the books got marketed and distributed to the various book outlets. Now all authors have Web pages and can sell directly to their readers. We authors now have the means to control the production and sale of our work, just as other artists and craftsmen have been doing for centuries.

A key term in the new computerized economy is “disintermediation”—i. e., the elimination of the middleman—and publishers disintermediate wherever they can. Computerized bar code scans of sales information eliminate the need for using distributors for restocking and inventory purposes. Direct market book club sales eliminate the need for booksellers—and lower the author percentage to boot. Manuscripts delivered in the form of word-processed and spell-checked disks eliminate the need for typesetters.

Shifting perspective to the author's POV, the new technologies make it possible to see the publishers themselves as the biggest middlemen in the industry. Publishers are not our employers. They do not pay us health, life, and/or dental insurance, nor do they offer retirement benefits. They give us no vacation or sick leave. They do not provide us with office supplies, nor do they take responsibility for the quality of our working conditions. Publishers are simply book production and distribution middlemen, and they can be disintermediated as easily as any other. The only groups who can't be disintermediated are the authors and the read-

ers, precisely because neither of them is in the middle.

I coined the phrase “studio publishing” to emphasize not only the artisanry and craftsmanship of what we do as professional fiction writers, but also the individuality. Studio publishing is to commercial publishing what a clothing boutique is to brand name clothing stores in malls. Studio publishing is to commercial publishing what a single restaurant is to a restaurant chain. These analogies do *not* refer to the quality of the stories or the writing in either studio published or commercial published books; they refer only to the quantity of books involved and the differing profit margins that result from the different ways the books are produced and distributed. The quality of a book is not the result of a particular *method* of publishing, but of the *quality controls* that publishers place on their products with respect to editing, copy-editing, design, and materials.

Studio publishing is ideal for writers of popular fiction. First, as a group, we have a tradition of being responsive to our readers. We know what they want, and we aren't likely to wish to publish a manuscript that isn't going to appeal to them. Second, as members of NINC, we take the business side of writing seriously. In other words, we're old pros, and we know the value of high-quality editors, copy-editors, and book designers.

How I Got Started

Over the past five years, my vision of the changes taking place in the commercial publishing industry was beginning to take form. About two years ago, that vision suddenly crystallized. As a result, I began to reevaluate the relationship between my writing and what I saw happening in the industry. With the help of a couple of royalty statements and one pretty decent royalty check, I was able to act on my new understanding of myself as a writer who no longer needed to be exploited by the economic pressures affecting the industry as a whole.

In October, 1995 I was shocked to learn that the numbers of direct market sales of a series romance I was writing for had shot up—way up—while the numbers for the retail sales had plummeted. This is hardly shocking news now, but at the time I was surprised into saying to my husband, somewhat rashly, “Jeez, I'd rather sell 3,000 copies of a book on which I made \$5 profit per book, than 100,000 copies of a book on which I make a dime each.” I am not a great mathematician, so I like to keep my numbers round and easy to manipulate.

In May, 1996 I wasn't shocked to receive my royalty statements and checks, but I said something even more surprising than I had the first time around. For years I had been hankering after a ruby ring and ruby earrings, and with this period's royalty check my husband and I had agreed I should have them to celebrate our upcoming 20th wedding anniversary. However, when I looked at one of the checks, I

Publishers are simply book production and distribution middlemen, and they can be disintermediated as easily as any other. The only groups who can't...are the authors and the readers, precisely because neither of them is in the middle.

said, "Screw the rubies. I'm gonna start my own publishing company. I don't have anything to lose."

I had also come to a point in my writing life where I had determined a certain dollar figure that I personally considered my stories were worth. On my last manuscript submission go-around, when the offers were lower than my personal floor, I decided to earn for myself what I thought I was worth.

The Logic of Studio Publishing

If you are a brand-name author, there is no reason to consider studio publishing. The current commercial publishing system is functioning, in effect, as your studio. If you are not a brand-name author, then you are currently under pressure to discover your artistic and economic thresholds in the present "winner take all" publishing economy. You're having to come to grips with the possible disjunctions among your personal writing vision, your perception of your readers' preferences, and your publisher's perception of your readers' preferences; and you're having to weigh these competing imperatives against a cost-benefit analysis of your writing income relative to the time you spend on each book in relationship to your household's overall finances. Lurking somewhere at the edge of all these considerations is your opinion of how well the commercial publishing industry is performing its gatekeeping function of separating the wheat from the chaff, of publishing only those manuscripts worthy of publication.

When I realized that I could achieve a better balance among all these factors through studio publishing, I began to put my publishing career literally into my own hands.

Keep in mind that, if you go into studio publishing, you will be engaged in a start-up business. This means that you will not be likely to replace your current writing income the moment you produce your first book. You must also not expect it to be easy—but, then, who in the publishing industry doesn't know how difficult it is these days to make a buck selling books?

So, studio publishing isn't a get-rich-quick scheme. Nor is it a type of publicity stunt whose real purpose is to catch the eye of a commercial publisher in a new way. Rather, studio publishing is a response to the new "e-economy." It's about authors taking control of their writing lives and careers for the long-term.

I will address the microeconomic realities of studio publishing in the next installment. For now, the macroeconomic logic of the venture boils down to 4 points:

1. Print technology is currently all in the author's favor.

We've been sending our disks to our publishers for years. It's just as easy to send them directly to book manufacturers. Software programs such as QuarkXpress or Page-Maker help us design our books as we write, thus eliminating interior book design costs.

The technological trajectory suggests that improvements will only further favor authors. If the Bookman

becomes as widely available and used as the Walkman, then we have only to market our stories on diskette, without even turning them into physical books. If print-on-demand technology becomes practical and profitable, then we do not need to worry about the problem of print runs, which are extravagantly wasteful from two points of view: a) they represent large capital expenditures; and b) they are notoriously impossible to hit "Goldilocks" right—not too big and not too small.

Caveat: I do not know, nor have I found anyone who does know, when or whether the Bookman or print-on-demand technology will truly materialize. Given the uncertainty of the new technologies and their possible effects, the issue of electronic rights and royalties is especially vexing for both publishers and authors. In "Electronic Rights" (*NINK*, February, 1997), Sarah Smith notes: "Ownership of content is key." Check out her informative article if you didn't catch it the first time around. In the meantime, as a content provider, it is in your best interest to look into how many of your copyrights are due to revert to you and start exercising your reversion clauses now.

We know that the Web is an excellent marketing tool, and although no one knows yet how good it will prove as a transactional medium, the trend is apparent. New means for facilitating purchases on the Web are rapidly being developed, Amazon.com has already gone public, and on-line distributors are beginning to pop up. Since the relationship between commercial publishers and author Web pages should be the subject of a separate article, I will confine myself to saying only that authors are in a perfect position to shape the future of book buying and selling on the Web.

2. Just because the book distribution and sales system is currently imploding doesn't mean that authors' careers have to implode along with it.

The book distribution and sales system is currently collapsing because it: a) operates on business practices and assumptions that predate the computer and the web; and b) is based on what has become a ruinous policy for publishers, namely reimbursing bookstores for unsold books. This policy dates back to the Depression when publishers wanted booksellers to take chances on unknown authors. What might have been a good idea 60 years ago has long since ceased to benefit publishers in the current climate of superstores and deep discounting, and we've all heard much about the disastrous rates of returns.

Even if this old-fashioned retail system changes, as some experts are predicting, there is no reason to believe that any improvements will necessarily benefit the author. The system was never set up to benefit the author's bottom line in the first place. In the meantime, there is no reason for the individual author to remain caught up in the old system's dysfunction.

We all know the percentages. Of the current cover price, roughly 45% goes to the publisher, 40% to the bookstore, 10% to the author, and 5% to the distributor. Author percentages can vary from a sliver of 2.5% of cover

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Studio Publishing

(Continued from page 5)

(in direct market book club) to 15% (in big hard-soft deals), but mostly it's 6–10%, from which must be subtracted the agent's 10–15% commission.

As the content providers of the system, we authors are the ones who decide whether it is worth our while to continue to subsidize the many and increasingly inefficient layers of middlemen in the publishing industry with 90% to 97.5% of the revenue from our work.

3. With a tweak of attitude, authors can begin to reap the full benefits of their self-promotional efforts.

As it now stands, authors' self-promotional efforts benefit their publishers more than they benefit themselves—from 4 to 20+ times the benefit, depending on where and how the book is sold.

I have yet to meet an author in Novelists, Inc. (myself included) who has not said, at one point or another, "I just want to write my books. I don't want to have to market them or promote them or, God forbid, publish them myself." I have yet to meet an author who has not said, at one point or another, "I don't want to have to deal with the business end of things. That's why I have an agent." I also have yet to meet an author who has not undertaken some kind of promotional campaign for at least one of his or her books—postcards, bookmarks, pins, refrigerator magnets, fanzine ads, you name it. Even showing up at a book signing counts as a self-promotional effort, because you use your physical self to promote your book. I also have not met an author in Novelists, Inc. who doesn't have a pretty good business head on his or her shoulders.

My point is that we've bought into our editors' and our publishers' urgings to self-promote, self-promote, self-promote. They say we're building readership, but we're also benefitting their bottom lines more than we are benefitting our own. The next step is to realize that, with the same amount of effort that we're already putting in, we can build readership and benefit our own bottom lines even more.

The remarks of agent Natasha Kern (and she is still surely a credible source on this subject) are instructive. In "The Fine Art of Agenting" (*NINK*, July, 1997), Kern says that there is no question that publishers have increasingly become "very good printers" and that publicity efforts have fallen more and more on the shoulders of writers. Kern goes on to say that writers are often "unsuited by training, temperament, or financial resources to fulfill this task. Then, without a blink, Kern goes right on to assume that we unsuited authors *should* be self-promoting, that we don't have any choice *but* to self-promote. She concludes by noting that, although authors' self-promotional efforts are unlikely to increase the print runs or laydowns for the books they are publicizing, they are developing a stronger readership and

readers of future books, which will help their careers in the long term.

Well! As authors, we may well be unsuited by training and temperament for undertaking our own publicity campaigns, but, heck, the vast majority of us are backed into a self-promotional corner anyway, so why not go all the way and truly begin to promote and sell *our own* books for *ourselves*? In fact, this very thought was reinforced upon reading Sally Schoeneweiss's spirited article "Promotion on the Internet" (*NINK*, August, 1997). Schoeneweiss reports that many of us are already engaged in extraordinary self-promotional efforts that, as far as I can tell, seem to include everything but producing the actual book!

Threaded throughout various discussions on the Ninc-Link in the last year has been a discussion of the future of cyber-publishing, which has caused many of us much alarm. One futurist, Esther Dyson, has argued that eventually all print media will be up on the Net, and it will be free for all. In this publishing state of affairs, all costs attributable to paper, printing, inventory, and holding publications in stores go away. This means that all revenues associated with the sales of our books go away, too. Now, if intellectual property as such is to have little monetary value, Dyson hypothesizes that writers, artists, and composers will make their living by doing performances, readings, giving seminars, offering workshops, and going on line and interacting with their audiences—and this is precisely where we, as writers, begin to feel alarm.

We're writers, not performance celebrities, right? Right. However, given the current technological conditions, it's wiser to understand ourselves as content providers and, as such, it's in our best interest to own the rights to our content and take on the dissemination of our work ourselves.

As to the importance and legality of a copyright, Dyson believes that, in the new electronic age, writers *will* be able to protect their work by copyright. It's just that we won't be able to make money from the old sense of copyright—namely, the *right to*

copy—the way we (and the publishers) used to. This is why there is so much fuss and confusion about electronic rights, and everyone is wondering who—if anyone—will profit in the future from the electronic reproduction of a work. In Dyson's model, the work will simply be "out there" for free, and the author will not profit from its multiple reproduction. The copyright will nevertheless protect the author by tethering the author to the work's content, so that the author can

Studio publishing is a response to the new "e-economy."... authors taking control of their writing lives and careers for the long-term.

get paid for having provided that content in ways other than its multiple reproduction, e. g., through consulting jobs, speaking engagements, and workshops.

This new, post-publishing model is not about all of us poor, unsuited-for-self-promotion authors suddenly ceasing to be writers and becoming celebrities. It's about becoming savvier self-promoters than we already are. We aren't in the full-blown electronic age yet, anyway, and it is still possible to sell multiple copies of individual titles, as we all know. And just because Dyson proclaims something about the future doesn't inevitably make it so. However, authors committed to careers for the long term stand to benefit from seriously considering the implications of Dyson's vision of the publishing future.

For me, the only questions that remain are: How many copies of one of my titles is it possible for me to sell in the next few years? What form of the book is currently most desirable to produce: mass-market paper, trade paper, petite hardcover, hardcover? How long will the physical book last as a profitable item to produce in multiple copies? What other kinds of text and hypertext formats should I be investigating?

4. The costs of book manufacturing make studio publishing a viable option for most authors in Novelists, Inc.

Economic shifts in the publishing industry have demanded that the books commercial publishers buy need to have higher level of sales than they used to. Commercial publishers have extremely heavy expenses, beginning with the huge advances they pay for celebrity books, which all their other titles must amortize. In addition, the overhead expenses in New York are high, and their payrolls of editors, copy-editors, marketers, artists, publicists, accountants, lawyers, and CEOs are large. Then, too, commercial publishers must constantly juggle their assets/liabilities columns to cover the capital losses they incur at three points in the production cycle: a) printing a number of books that b) are returned at a seemingly unpredictable rate, which then c) need to be shredded. No wonder we authors are continually confounded by the mysterious bookkeeping category "reserves against returns" in the hopelessly antiquated procedure by which royalties are paid!

In sum, the demand for increasingly higher sales per book stems from the *commercial publisher's economic needs*.

A studio publisher can be profitable with a radically lower volume of sales because the studio publisher has no overhead, can shop around for the best outsourced prices for cover art, etc. , and reaps all the profit. When the profit margin per book increases, the need for volume decreases proportionally.

I must have already had a vague grasp on these factors when I received my October, 1995 royalty statements, because it turns out my initial estimate of a possible profit margin (\$5/book) was not too far off. Like any other manufacturing undertaking, economy of scale pertains: the more

widgets you manufacture, the less it costs per widget to produce. Once the presses are up and running, it's cheaper per book to print 10,000 than 1,000, but you may not care to be faced with 10,000 books to warehouse and sell, and you may not wish to lay out the capital to print them. I'll take up the specifics of these costs in the next article.

In the meantime, I'll give you a thumbnail idea of production costs. Manufacturing 10,000 books in trade paperback size (6"x9"), 350 pages, decent cover and high-quality paper, priced in the \$10-\$15 range costs: *about \$1 per book*. (I was surprised, too.) The lower the print run, the higher the cost per book, such that 3,000 of the same book will cost: *about \$2 per book*. Manufacturing a mass-market paperback with pulp paper and a selling price of \$5 - \$7 may cost, depending on the price of paper, the cover treatment, and number of copies printed: *about 30 cents per book*.

Feeling Crazy

Once I had worked through the macro- and microeconomics of all this over the last few years, and once I had been seized by the overwhelming logic of the endeavor, I began to act.

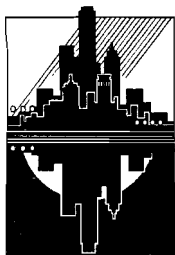
I noticed, soon enough, that I was acting alone.

It wasn't a good feeling. I mean, if studio publishing was so logical and obvious, why weren't most of the authors I know doing it? Last winter, as I was working through the final stages of my first studio publication, my book designer said, off-hand, that she was sure that this was a scary undertaking for me. That struck me as odd. I told her that at no moment had I ever felt any fear. What was there to be afraid of, after all? On the other hand, I admitted to repeated moments of feeling crazy.

It wasn't until I went to the Duel on the Delta Writers Conference in Memphis this past spring and began to speak about my venture to other authors that my feelings of craziness began to lessen. Given the enthusiastic response to what I was doing from several of the authors at that conference, I was confirmed in my original idea that I might actually be on to something good. I left the conference emboldened to discuss my venture on various author e-links, beginning with NincLink. In time, Sploop, the Studio Publishing loop, was formed. (To join the discussion, write Neff Rotter at: neff@sfo.com.) Through Sploop, we have now formed an umbrella marketing organization called The Authors' Studio, the first community of small presses dedicated to publishing quality popular fiction and non-fiction.

I still feel crazy at times, but now it's usually a good feeling. **NINK**

Julie Tetel Andresen's first studio-published book, Swept Away, appeared in April, 1997 under the imprint Helix Books. It is available through her web site <http://www.helix-books.com> or through her e-mail address: jtetel@acpub.duke.edu. She is preparing two new studio publications for 1998. Her 15th commercial romance, Sweet Sarah Ross, appeared in May, 1997 from Harlequin Historicals. She has also published with Fawcett and Warner Books.



CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Before I unplug my phone, cancel my e-mail account, dye my hair, change my name, and leave town on a fast bus, there are some people who deserve acknowledgment. Without their initiative and hard work, the 1997 conference would have been a sorry mess instead of a resounding success.

First and foremost, I can't say enough about **Pat Kay**, who put together NINC's most ambitious program ever, never losing her good humor and grace as she dealt with all sorts of personalities, scheduling conflicts, budget restraints, and last-minute cancellations.

Meanwhile, the first-ever NINC exhibition of original cover art could never have taken place without the generosity and patience of **Andrea Senchy**. Neither a writer nor a NINC member, she donated many, many hours of personal time (and many personal contacts, including the **Lunarians**, whose equipment we used) to planning and organizing our art show, and then gave up her entire weekend to make sure it all went as planned. I met Andrea through my good friend **Gail Walotsky** (wife of cover artist Ron Walotsky), who helped me start the whole endeavor in the first place.

Art show director **Sandra Kitt** worked tirelessly for months, coordinating with the exhibiting artists, the hotel, and other conference committees. (And I will now admit that I lied to her when I assured her it really wouldn't be very much work.)

Binnie Syril Braunstein handled yet another first-time position with grace and good humor, doing a wonderful job of running the NINC conference's first-ever PR campaign — and on a shoe-string budget. Editor/Agent Liaison **Deb Stover** started with a comically out-of-date database and eventually got the biggest-ever contingent of agents and

editors to attend the NINC conference. **Kathy Chwedyk** performed more duties for this conference than I could keep track of or list here, and ultimately — in cooperation with **Randy Russell** — created a comprehensive registration system for what was far and away the greatest number people who've ever attended a NINC conference.

I have now learned that the incompetence and duplicity of publishers is exceeded only by that of hotels, and I don't know what I'd have done without our wonderful professional conference planner, **Nancy Schmiderer**, who made order of out chaos on an almost weekly basis. Almost every portion of the conference also owes some of its success to **Catherine Coulter**, who repeatedly went out of her way to offer moral support and practical help to us in virtually every endeavor. **Jennifer Crusie** not only headlined two program items, but also organized and wrote NINC's own guidebook to the city.

Vicki Lewis Thompson, **Lisa Ann Verge**, and **Carla Neggers** couldn't even *come* to the conference, yet they contributed many hours of their time to it. Vicki, along with **Judy Myers**, organized the bags full of free books for conference attendees. Lisa Verge spent weeks trying to organize a field trip which would satisfy my scheduling requirements and budget constraints — and then forgave me when I canceled the whole idea. Carla helped me with a hundred details, held my hand in the panicky beginning, and provided us with a huge list of booksellers which she researched at my request.

Already committed to some sort of Wild Woman Wilderness outing the same weekend as NINC, **Robyn Carr** nonetheless volunteered to make some 50 phone calls to help us out. **Becky Barker** handled

roommate coordination so well that I never heard another word about it (except in praise of her) once she took over. **Roberta Gellis** made many phone calls for us and readily agreed to our panic-stricken last-minute pleas concerning programming. **Julie Kistler** and **Curtissann Matlock** also donated time and effort to the conference without any public recognition.

The **Board Of Directors** gave me encouragement and sensible feedback every month during my regular reports to them. NINC president **Victoria Thompson** is also a previous NINC conference coordinator (several times over) who answered many of my frantic questions over the months. Our printer, **Sandy Huseby**, demonstrated patience and flexibility when it was most needed.

Jayne Ann Krentz, the first NINC member to be a special guest speaker at the NINC conference, not only did a great job, but generously donated her speaker's fee and travel expenses to the art show. And our keynote speaker, **Thomas McCormack**, promptly and graciously accepted our belated invitation to him after our initial speaker suddenly canceled on us in late May.

This was NINC's most ambitious conference to date, and it required the efforts of many, many people besides the ones I've already named. More people than I can possibly cite here volunteered beforehand, volunteered on-site, and called or e-mailed me to offer support, help, or contacts. I also want to acknowledge the wonderful job done by all program participants. **Anne Holmberg** will hurt me if I let this column get much longer, so I can't name (or, to be honest, even remember) everyone, but every single volunteer (including Anne) and program participant was essential in making this the best NINC conference ever.

Finally, a number of people over the months asked me about getting a complimentary conference fee. Apart from being invited to be the keynote or special guest speaker, there are only three ways to get comped for the conference:

(1) Serve on the NINC Board of

Directors. This means you work for 12 months.

(2) Write the *NINK* conference report. This means you work for the entire three to four days of the conference.

(3) Volunteer for one of the comped positions on the conference committee. There are traditionally three such positions: conference coordinator, editor/agent liaison, and program director. This year, I created two additional such positions: PR director and art show chair. This means you work 10 months, work throughout the three to four days of the conference, and possibly do follow-up work afterwards.

Unfortunately, NINC's budget does not leave room for us to comp everyone else who contributes so much to the conference in big and small ways.

As for me... I'm cheerfully retiring forever from Realpolitik. Running the 1997 conference fulfilled the personal goals I had set for myself of learning to lead a committee, manage a budget, and play well with others. Now that that's done, I am enthusiastically looking forward to returning to the lifestyle which suits me best: never answering my phone; telling people who annoy me where to get off; leaving town whenever I want to; and — most importantly — just writing my books.

The bar is closed. The fat lady has sung. The jester bells are silent. And Elvis has left the building.

— **Laura Resnick**, 1997 NINC Conference Coordinator



I've been Web-surfing again,
and you know what that means

ONLINE

... Yep, lots of great sites to share with you this month! To be fair, I heard about most of these sites from folks on NinLink or elsewhere, but I do try to check out sites before I recommend them here—and sometimes I find links to even cooler sites that way.

One example is www.ipl.org/reading/books/index.html, the Internet Public Library. I found it by clicking on a link at www.cs.cmu.edu/People/spok/books.html, the Online Books site, recommended by someone on the Link. Both sites list and link to actual texts of books available (for free!) to read online. The IPL site is the bigger one, with over 5500 texts available. A quick search for "Dickens" turned up 45 listings—pretty much the complete works of Charles Dickens. You can search by author or title. These texts are either public domain or available by permission of the copyright holder. Great for research, when you don't want to schlep down to the local library.

Another good site is www.babycenter.com/babyname/index.html, where you can search for character (okay, or baby) names by gender, national origin, first letter, or number of syllables. You won't find just Anglo-Saxon and German names, either, but Ghanese, Yoruban and Sanskrit (yes, Sanskrit!) names as well, along with the meaning of each name.

On the business side of research, there's www.geocities.com/SoHo/studios/7568/Agents.htm. This site lists agents who charge fees, refer writers to book doctors, or engage in other questionable practices. You might be surprised at some of the names there! Wal-Mart is online now, with what may be the most reasonably priced bookstore on the Web, at www.walmart.com. And in case you hadn't heard, the Waldenbooks Romance Bestseller list is back, via the RWA Web-

site (www.rwanational.com), where you can view the lists for the past ten weeks. Oh, and **Amazon.com** now has its own bestseller list, too, divided into very specific subgenres. It's heartening to see how many backlist titles (some more than two years old) are on the Amazon lists. Check them out!

The month of September was a real rollercoaster on NinLink, with the closest thing we've had to a flame-war, followed by a particularly nasty case of the "bouncies." For those who missed Alysse's explanation, that rash of bounced posts stemmed from an online "spammer" or junk e-mailer hacking into our listserv. The problem has been fixed now, and new security measures are in place in hopes of preventing anything similar in the future. Even with all of that excitement, we managed to have an unusually rich crop of great discussions, spanning such topics as: whether agents really earn their commissions; reader demographics; the "dumbing down" of novels; the pros and cons of emoticons (something I may address in a future column); how book auctions work (very educational!); the benefits and drawbacks of teaser chapters; funny vs "angsty" books; and how Princess Di's life and death tapped into some universal myths to touch so many people.

NinLink subscriptions (yes, they're free!) seem to have leveled off now, holding steady since March at about 200 members. If you're not "linked" yet and want to be, all you have to do is send an e-mail:

To: **Majordomo@ninc.com**

Subject: Subscribe Your Name (as it appears on the NINC roster)

Body: subscribe NinLink-Digest Your-Email-Address

Once subscribed, post messages To: **NinLink@ninc.com**

Remember to send any happening online news to me at **BrendaHB@aol.com** or post it to NinLink. See you online!

— **Brenda Hiatt Barber** :)





Advocacy Column: *Rights and Resources*

Question: Who sits on the committees overseeing copyright and intellectual property law in the House and the Senate?

In the House, the Judiciary Committee has oversight of copyright and intellectual property through its Subcommittee on Courts and Intellectual Property, chaired by Howard Coble of NC. Subcommittee members are: F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. WI; Elton Gallegly, CA; Bob Goodlatte, VA; Sonny Bono, CA; Edward Pease, IN; Chris Cannon, UT; Bill McCollum, FL; Charles Canady, FL; Barney Frank, MA; John Conyers, Jr. MI; Howard Berman, CA; Rick Boucher, VA; Zoe Lofgren, CA; and William Delahunt, MA. In the Senate, the Rules Committee, chaired by John Warner, VA, oversees copyright issues. I was not given a list of committee members. However, a member of Senator Warner's staff urged me to tell our members that if you want to bring an issue to the committee's attention, write a letter or fax *your* Senate representative because you are a voter in that state and congressmen respond to voters . . . and committee members respond to other senators before they respond to letters written from people who are not voters in their own respective states. Hmmmmm.

Question: Must a writer be agented to sell foreign rights, or can the writer sell the rights independently? Once the rights revert back to an author, how should an unagented writer or the writer of a self-published book go about selling foreign rights?

Our answer is from Mary Edgerton, Rights Director for the Axlerod Agency and the Rowland & Axlerod Agency. She was formerly Foreign Rights Director at Workman Publishing Company and at Prentice Hall Press, a division of Simon & Schuster.

Yes, a writer can theoretically sell his or her own foreign rights, but I would strongly advise against it if there is any possibility of an agent's or publisher's representation. The international publishing market is vast and competitive. While it is true that many American authors are published in several languages, there are still fewer spots available to Americans authors overseas than there are in the home market. It is therefore highly advantageous to know the various foreign publishing houses, the kinds of books they publish, and better still, to have personal relationships with their editors.

Most agents and rights directors are in constant contact with a network of international publishing people: foreign editors, their American scouts, as well as sub-agents abroad. In many cases, they meet face-to-face several times a year to review titles. Scouts are appointed by foreign publishers to cover the American publishing market on their behalf. They report on new lists and catalogues and can be very helpful in drawing the foreign publisher's attention to books.

Many American agents and publishing houses also use

sub-agents. These people represent books in specific territories and are usually located in the country where they sell rights. The use of sub-agents is to further insure ongoing contact with each translation market and to target books to the most appropriate houses and editors.

This network of people selling and gathering information is extremely useful, but it would be difficult for an author to take part in it on an independent basis. Appearing on an agent's or publisher's list is truly an advantage because it allows writers to ride on their colleagues' coat tails. If one author sells well in a particular country, for example, an agent will be able to interest foreign editors and their scouts in other authors who write in a similar style or genre. A writer could theoretically bypass the American agent or publisher and hire an array of sub-agents, but this is not a common practice. For one thing, it would still involve lots of faxing, phoning, and mailing all over the world, and then if all goes well, bookkeeping in exotic currencies. Also, with the exception of a *bona fide* superstar author, I suspect that most sub-agents would view representing an individual author as a financially risky endeavor. Most prefer to handle groups of authors, among whom a few, at least, are guaranteed to sell to foreign publishers.

Having said all of the above, if a writer still wants to try to sell foreign rights independently, a good resource is the *International Literary Market Place* (the *ILMP*), published annually by R R Bowker. This lists the names and addresses of most foreign publishing houses and provides brief descriptions of the kinds of books they publish. Good luck!

One of the Advocacy Committee projects has been to compile a list of professionals who understand the publishing industry and the concerns of authors. We have built the list by soliciting recommendations from our members and others who have used the services of these people and think highly of them. Our wish is to give you a starting point for that day when you may need the services of an attorney, an accountant, or the other professionals listed here. *The appearance of a name on this list does not imply an endorsement from Novelists, Inc.* Please use good judgment and follow sound business practices by doing a bit of research before you hire the services of one of these individuals. For that reason, we've included the name of the member who recommended the professional for your reference. We are still adding names to the list.

If you have worked with a professional whom you can recommend to others, please send the name to the Advocacy Committee using the address at the bottom of this column.

CPAs/Auditors/Tax Advisors

Barry Blackman, CPA, Palmer Lake, CO, 719-488-3660

Recommended by: Pam McCutcheon, Anne Holmberg

Bradley Clark, CPA, Baltimore, MD, 410-298-0348

Recommended by: Mary Jo Putney
Andrew Mitchell, CPA/Auditor, Upper Montclair, NJ,
201-744-2200

Recommended by: Victoria Thompson
Roy Lebson, Accountant/CPA, Lebson and Associates,
Baltimore, MD, 410-653-3073

Recommended by: Binnie Syril Braunstein
Paul Rosenzweig, Auditor/Accountant, Royalty Review
Services, New York, NY 212-557-2692 and Walnut
Creek, CA 510- 947-0829

Recommended by: Author's Guild, Robin Lee Hatcher

Attorneys

Frank Curtis, Attorney—Contracts Law, Rembar and
Curtis, New York, NY , 212-575-8500

Recommended by: Damaris Rowland

Elaine English, Attorney—Intellectual Property Law,
Washington, D.C. 202-429-2086

Recommended by: Mary Kilchenstein, Cathy Maxwell

Phil Farthing, Attorney—Tax Law and Estate Planning,
Payne, Gates, Farthing & Radd, Norfolk, VA
757-640-1500

Recommended by: Cathy Maxwell

Scott Harris, Attorney—Contracts and Intellectual Property
Law, Atlanta, GA , 770-379-1449

Recommended by: Pat Rice, Sandra Chastain

Michael Lennie, Attorney—Intellectual Property Law,
Valley Center, CA 619-749-1033

Recommended by: Paul Rosenzweig

Craig Mytelka, Attorney—Intellectual Property and
Copyright Matters, Clark & Stant P.C., Norfolk, VA
757-499-8800

Recommended by: Cathy Maxwell

Jerome Noll, Attorney—Publishing and Intellectual Prop-
erty Law, Lax and Noll, New York, NY 212-818-9150

Recommended by: Authors Guild, Robin Lee Hatcher

Lloyd L. Rich, Attorney—Rights and Intellectual Property
Management, Denver, CO, 303-388-0291

Recommended by: Paul Rosenzweig

Other Professionals

Binnie Syril Braunstein, Press Kits, Press Kit Communica-
tions, Baltimore, MD, 410-486-6178

Recommended by: Cathy Maxwell

Bonnie Crisalli, Freelance Editor, The Write Stuff,
PO Box 263, Richfield, OH 44286

Recommended by: Ginney Schweiss, Leigh Shaheen

Leslie Kazanjian, Freelance Editor, New York, NY
212-758- 1855

Recommended by: Mary Kilchenstein, Dee Holmes

Mary Kilchenstein, Freelance Editor, Rockville, MD
301- 424-3263

Recommended by: Binnie Syril Braunstein

Kathleen Onorato, Promotions Specialist, Creative
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Recommended by: Cathy Maxwell

Jo-Ann Power, Public Relations Specialist, Power
Promotions, San Antonio, TX, 830-755-4728

Recommended by: Cathy Maxwell

Connie Rinehold, Freelance Editor, Aurora, CO,

Connierine@aol.com

Recommended by: Pat Rice, Colleen Faulkner
Denise Dietz Wiley, Freelance Editor, Colorado Springs,
CO, 719-632-5408

Recommended by: Emily Krokosz

A big thank you to all who volunteered names for our
list. NINC member LaRee Bryant has also offered the bene-
fit of her insight and experience for those with questions.
LaRee is a former member of the RWA Professional Rela-
tions Committee and can be reached at 972- 255-0316.

If you have a name or names to add to the Advocacy
list, or if you wish to address a question to the Advocacy
Column, please contact Cathy Maxwell, 804-744-3376 or
e-mail C.Maxwell6@genie.com. Please note this is a new
e-mail address. She's having trouble receiving mail through
the MSN address. **NINK**

Send Money Now...

Sometimes it pays to complain. Last month I
reported that I was trying to negotiate a reduction in
the group subscription fee NINC members pay for
Publishers Weekly, and, amazingly, we got it. In-
stead of \$139/year, NINC members can renew—or
join—the NINC group *Publishers Weekly* subscription
for \$129/year. That's a \$40 savings over the indi-
vidual rate and will pay more than half of your NINC
dues. Such a deal.

The 33 of you who already participate in the
NINC group subscription simply need to send me a
check, made out to Novelists, Inc., for \$129 by
November 15. (NO LATER.) If you don't have a
subscription of any kind to *Publishers Weekly* and
want to take advantage of this opportunity, ditto:
check to me for \$129 made out to Novelists, Inc. by
November 15. (NO LATER.) New subscribers should
also indicate the name and address to which the
subscription is to be sent. If you already have an
individual subscription to *PW* and want to save \$40,
just mail or fax me a copy of your *PW* address label
ASAP—don't wait until November 15. *PW* will pro-
rate what you've already paid so you'll only pay the
balance to extend your subscription to December
1998. I'll e-mail or call you with the necessary
amount and you'll send me a check for that amount
made out to Novelists, Inc. by November 15. (NO
LATER.)

Here's all the address, phone, etc. information:
14201 Skyline Rd. NE, Albuquerque NM 87123-
2335; phone 505-293-8015; fax 505-296-9139;
e-mail pgevans@worldnet.att.net

Oh, and did I mention you must send your check
by November 15? (NO LATER!)

— **Patty Gardner Evans**



EAST OF THE HUDSON

Well, Duhhhhhh!!!

We used to have a saying, back at the California newspaper where I worked: "It ain't really *news* until it has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, even if the most solitary bird-watcher already knows it."

The *New York Times* seems to use the same tactic, soberly reporting, under a five-column headline, that "Authors With Less Than Stellar Sales Are Unwanted by Big Houses."

That's yesterday's news, friends. We in the trenches have known for some time that midlist is dead, at least as far as the major publishers are concerned.

The *Times* piece did, however, contain a few factoids worth noting. One is that the current definition of "midlist" is harsh. Reporter Doreen Carvajal claimed that sales of at least 15,000 hardback copies seem to be required to interest the Bigs.

That's a lot of books.

Carvajal also reported that many writers with multiple novels to their credit are switching to pseudonyms to avoid the superstore computers. Others are doing what amounts to self-publishing by putting their works on the Web.

Still others are turning to small and university presses, even through, as Carvajal points out, royalty advances from such houses are smaller than the price tag on an old, high-mileage car.

Carvajal reported that many of the mid-listed authors have become skilled guerrilla marketers. One had a whole sheaf of glowing rejection letters from major publishers. This author took her manuscript and her rejection letters to a publisher so small its offices are located above a Blimpie's sandwich shop in Manhattan.

And she used the comments from the rejection letters as cover blurbs.

Now *that's* creativity.

I Told You So. Yes, I Did

Next time you have difficulty making your New York editor understand something that you regard as a basic aspect of everyday life, just remember, editors live in a very strange place.

As proof, I offer the following. It is now legal, in the city of New York, to own and operate a personal garbage disposal.

That's right. For more than a quarter century, Insinkerators and other such satanic devices have been illegal in Manhattan. My state bans cocaine and assault rifles. New York bans modern electrical appliances.

The ban was instituted a quarter-century ago out of con-

cern for the plumbing in all those aging high-rise apartment buildings. But now, thanks to a formal action by the City Council, you can install and operate an under-sink grinding unit of any caliber you desire and can afford.

There is, however, a catch. In accepting modern convenience, the City Council adopted a requirement that new disposals have both electrical and plumbing permits. True, the permits only cost a total of \$55.

But, since they can only be obtained by building-trade professionals, the price tag on a newly installed garbage disposal in the city is expected to be about \$2,000.

That's enough to make a midlist author pitch stuff out the window.

Hey, Buddy, Can You Spare Me Some Change

Something happens to your brain when you turn 50. You suddenly think you have been gifted with special insight. You think you can see change taking place around you in ways that you might have missed when you were 20. A couple of clippings I accumulated over the summer make the point quite nicely because in them I see what looks like a major shift for writers of the next century.

Start with a column by Michiko Kakutani, the *tres literary* critic of the *New York Times*. Ms. Kakutani wrote a fascinating little essay on what some think is the death of the author in literature. The culprit? Something called hypertext.

Kakutani describes hypertext as "nonsequential writing made up of text blocks that can be linked by the reader in multiple ways." This literary form can be likened to a big live-action role-playing game in which the reader orders the scenes as he or she wishes. It seems to be all the rage at the moment in some quarters. Experimental novelist Robert Coover calls it a way of ending "the domination by the author" — "that compulsory author-directed movement from the beginning of the sentence to its period, from the top of the page to the bottom, from the first page to the last."

And here I thought that was just good grammar.

Hypertext theory grew out of deconstructionism, militant multiculturalism, and several other isms popular on the more lunatic campuses of the country. But now it has escaped the Ivory Tower and is running rampant through the broader culture. *Esquire* published a serial story of this sort by five professional writers and amazon.com ran an online hypertext-type contest involving a 46-chapter story with first and last chapters created by John Updike.

Kakutani seems to be uncomfortable with the whole idea, which she described as blurring "the line between writers and readers" by the creation of "multivocal" works which do away with the very concept of author. "A lone individual bent on expressing an idiosyncratic vision" is replaced, she says, by an art form that reinforces "the sort of self-

absorption and egotism promoted by talk shows: everyone's an expert, anyone can be an artist, and all opinions are equally valid, especially your own."

Heady stuff, right? Theoretical and highly intellectualized. Utterly unrealistic, too, right?

Well here's something that is a good deal more troubling.

There are, at the moment, something like 800 Websites in the world that specialize in fan fiction and e-mail. For the uninitiated, that means there are 800 spots on the Web where readers and fans can talk about their favorite popular fiction characters and, in many cases, even create stories using those characters.

Such stories are then "published" online for others to read, enjoy, and, if they like, change. One of the hottest of the sites, devoted to television's *X-Files*, has accumulated 6,000 stories in 18 months, according to the *New York Times*.

Most of the fan-fiction sites are generated by television shows. *Xena, Warrior Princess* and *ER* all have avid followings. But there are no limits on the trend. I can see a time when one of my wife's fans gets sick and tired of waiting around for Utah's story and decides to supply it herself, and then to publish it online.

Some see these sites as democratizing forces. Henry Jenkins of MIT was quoted by the *Times* as saying "Fan fiction is a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by the folk."

Anybody beginning to see where I'm headed here?

Finally, we've got another *NYT* piece about an electronic system that would, in effect, brand documents on the Internet as *not* being available for borrowing, embroidering, or outright theft.

The tagging system, called "digital object identifier" or DOI, would protect and track digital copies of anything from journal articles to novels.

The value of such a system is obvious. It could provide a way for material to be viewed on screen but not downloaded or printed. It might even be useful in collecting per-view payments to publishers and/or to authors. It's some distance from being perfected, but the Association of American Publishers and several individual media firms are studying it very carefully.

Writers ought to be aware of it, too, don't you think?

I picked up all three of these scraps of information/opinion over the summer, but I lacked a framework for them until the other night when I learned that Novelists, Inc. is facing a decision in the near future about membership.

As many of you are already aware, and as all of you will

become aware soon, someone who has been published online but not elsewhere has requested membership in our organization. Since NINC has strict requirements for membership, all of us are going to be asked to examine what we believe is involved in the act of authorship.

Does publication of a work on the Internet amount to real publication or is it some form of self-publishing? That's the obvious question we must answer. But there are other questions, more global and at the same time more pressing. Who owns the right to move popular characters around the page or across the computer screen? And if ownership/authorship issues are as clear online as they are in hard copy, how are we going to make sure they stay that way?

Lots of stuff changes in our world. There are new ideas and new processes coming along every day. Many of us, probably most of us, would like nothing better than to sit with our noses glued to our screens all day, creating characters and stories which we can control. But life isn't that tidy. We need to look up once in a while to make sure we are all reading and writing on the same page.

Mr. Big

In case you wondered about the value of bestsellerdom, here's a standard against which to judge your last advance.

Pearson PLC, which now owns Putnam Berkley, just paid Tom Clancy more than \$100 million for a series of contracts. The agreements cover two Clancy originals, worth a reported \$50 million, plus book and multimedia rights for four projects being developed by his film company and 22 paperbacks to tie in with the author's upcoming ABC miniseries.

I am envious, of course, but that's not the point. The point is the product we create can, in some circumstances, become extraordinarily valuable. Most of us will never hit a gusher like Clancy has, but we should remember those numbers when publishers demand character or series rights, electronic and print media exploitation, and all the rest of the things that corporate bean-counters would like to extract from us.

I know, I know, electronic rights don't really amount to a hill of beans. Just ask Jack, er, I mean *Tom* Clancy.

This Just In To Our Newsroom

In case you hadn't noticed, this column is really an exercise in making sausage. I wander around, picking up bits and pieces of grist and offal from other published sources. Then I run them through the grinder of what passes for my mind and present them to you encased in....

Well, never mind. You probably didn't want to know too much about the process of making sausage, >>>



EAST OF THE HUDSON

(Continued from page 13)
anyway.

However derivative this column is, once in a while I stumble across a prize that is simply too big to pass comfortably through my grinder. Lots of pieces from the *New York Times* or *PW* can be boiled down and digested and commented upon in 25 words or less. Not so, with an article on the state (read "sad state") of publishing in the October 6 issue of the *New Yorker Magazine*.

Ken Auletta has done a masterful job of looking at contemporary publishing, interviewing its leading thinkers, and cogitating upon what he has learned. The result is a long and fascinating mediation on publishing's present crisis and on its future problems.

Just a few ideas from the piece that might tempt you into reading the whole thing:

- ◆ Several of the big publishers in New York are for sale. But, for the first time in recent years, no one wants to buy them, at least not at a price that makes them salable.

- ◆ The actual cost of manufacturing a hardcover book is only about ten percent of its cover price, or about \$2.50 on a \$25 novel. However, by the time a publisher gets a

book to the bookstore, it has cost him \$12.25. With the current discounting structure, that leaves the publisher with a very narrow profit margin, one that can be sliced even thinner by returns, which presently are running at 45 percent.

- ◆ Barnes & Noble has already bought several specialty publishing houses, including the ones that put together such bookstore staples as Monarch Notes. It may well be in the market for one of the major publishing houses presently on the sales block.

- ◆ The book-buying audience in this country is estimated to be about 12 million persons, roughly the number of people who attend live theater. Yet more and more, editors and publishers are chasing after books that have to be mass-marketed. "We've got caught up in a Hollywood mentality without Hollywood numbers," said one executive.

There's lots more in the Auletta piece, so much more that I'm not going to try to distill it. Go out and find a copy for yourself and then read it, if only because it represents the conventional wisdom in Manhattan.

I'm not saying the story isn't a sobering one. In fact, it probably will make you want to go out and get drunk. But at least you'll find lots of company at the bar.

— *Evan Maxwell, resident curmudgeon*

1998 Conference Dates and Site Announced

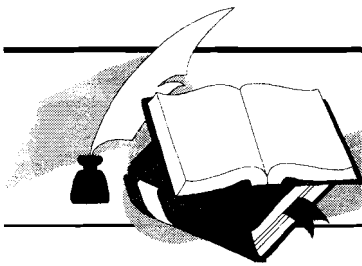
Mark your calendar now, so you won't miss the 1998 Novelists, Inc. Conference in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Conference dates will be October 15 to 18, 1998. Site of the conference is the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort & Casino located in Incline Village on the North Shore. Rate are \$125 single or double. Call 1-800-233-1234 for reservations.

The Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort and Casino features four-star meeting facilities and accommodations surrounded by some of Nature's finest creations. Imagine majestic High Sierra peaks and sunny blue skies, reflected in crystal clear waters. [Imagine the Corleones fishing somewhere out on the lake.] Explore mountain meadows on horseback, then relive the legend of the West at the nearby Ponderosa Ranch, home of TV's "Bonanza."

You'll have a range of lodging options among the 458 rooms, including a 12 story tower with 22 suites and exclusive Regency Club accommodations, additional three-story wings and 12 Lakeside Cottage buildings on the private beach.

24-hr casino, cabaret entertainment, three restaurants ('Old Tahoe' style at the Lone Eagle Grille for American cuisine, Italy meets the Orient at Ciao Mein Trattoria, or the more casual Sierra Cafe), private resort beach, tennis courts, heated pool and jet spa, complete health and fitness club, six nearby golf courses.

What more could you ask? Editors? Agents? Your writing colleagues? Don't worry, you'll have ample opportunity to help make it happen as we begin planning Novelists, Inc. '98 — in Tahoe.



How I Write...AT LONG LAST

I have especially enjoyed this new "How I Write" column in the newsletter and thought I would share my own story, which is that of perhaps the slowest learner in the history of the business. To be precise, it has taken me seventeen years and twenty-eight novels finally to learn how to write like a professional.

You have to understand that for sixteen years I have been awe-struck by the amount of time most of my fellow writers seemed to put in at their computers each day. How do they do it? I wondered in amazement. How do people actually *sit* there for six and seven and eight hours a day? How do they write two and three and four books a year?

I admired such people enormously, but never in a million years did I dream that I could become one of them.

To understand my conviction, you have first to understand the writing schedule I had followed for sixteen years.

I started out my career by getting a neighbor's kid to babysit after school while I went to the public library to write my books in longhand. In fact, I wrote my first twelve Regencies this way, from three to five in the afternoon at the Milford public library.

This created a seemingly unbreakable pattern in my brain that I followed until just about a year ago: *Joan does not work for more than two hours a day.*

Another such pattern was set during my former incarnation as a high school teacher. After nine years of laboring in the classroom, I had it firmly etched in my brain that: *Joan does not work during the summer.*

Then we throw in the horse. The day is fine, the sun is shining, the air is cool and crisp. Who the hell wants to be indoors sitting at a computer when she can be out enjoying the pleasures of nature with her horse?

It's a good thing I live in New England or I would probably never have written any books at all.

You begin to see the nature of my problem.

But what about those dread deadlines, you may ask.

Easy. When I signed the contract for a new book, I just set the deadline so far ahead that I was sure to meet it. I always had the book ready to turn in before the deadline struck. And since I was doing hardcovers, my company, NAL did not want more than one book a year from me anyway.

It was a pleasant, stress-free life. Nothing like the life led by ninety percent of the members of Novelists, Inc.

There was only one problem with this wonderful scenario. I was writing straight historicals, and people are not exactly lining up in the street to buy straight historicals these days. So my clever agent got me an attractive contract with Warner, which required me to produce two 100,000-word romances a year.

Panic struck. How the hell was I going to write two books a year?

I kept my cool. "No problem," I told Claire Zion, my editor at Warner. "No problem," I told Aaron Priest, my wonderful agent.

Holy Mary Mother of God, I thought to myself. How am I going to write two novels in one year? I can't sit in front of the bloody computer for more than two hours. My mind goes blank. My legs cramp up. My eyes cross.

I talked to Catherine Coulter, who has always been a great source of encouragement to me. "How am I going to do this?" I asked her pitifully.

"Stop whining," she snapped. "Jayne Krentz wrote four books a year to establish herself. Just shut up and do it."

Big help, Catherine.

"How am I going to do this?" I asked my friend, Edith Layton Felber.

I was whining.

"Writing is like a muscle that you have to work," Edith told me. "Just stay at the computer a little longer each day, and you'll find you can build up to it. It's like lifting weights. It will get easier as you go along."

I hate lifting weights.

Then, at the last Novelists, Inc. conference, Millie Crisswell said something that made sense to me. She said she set a certain number of words a week that she had to get through. If she didn't do the required number on one day, she made up for it on the next day. Or she worked on the weekend.

Hmm, I thought. So I looked at my deadline and worked backwards and figured that I needed to do 20,000 words a month. At first this seemed overwhelming, but when I broke it down into five pages a day it didn't seem quite so bad.

With all this good advice in mind, I went to work on the second book of my contract. Some days it wasn't easy. For example, I would finish a chapter, which would take me three pages. In the past I would have smiled happily, turned off my computer and trekked off to the barn. This time I made myself get a start on the next chapter before I got up.

Amazingly, as time went on, I found that in general I had only to add another half hour to my writing time in order to come up with those five pages a day. And by the time my deadline was due, the book was finished, and proofread, and ready to turn in.

I was thrilled. And relieved.

I felt like a professional.

I even worked through the summer!

— Joan Wolf



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	Sept 3	Sept 10	Sept 17	Sept 24
Sandra Brown	<i>Above and Beyond</i> , Mira	44	79	112	
Sandra Brown	<i>Fat Tuesday</i> , Warner	115	150		
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Offer</i> , Topaz	156	65	18	22
Diane Mott Davidson	<i>The Main Corpse</i> , Bantam	139			
Diane Mott Davidson	<i>The Grilling Season</i> , Bantam		154	87	140
Jude Deveraux	<i>Legend</i> , Pocket	27	49	88	133
Tami Hoag	<i>Dark Paradise</i> , Bantam	15	28	49	73
Kay Hooper	<i>After Caroline</i> , Bantam		223	100	
Cait London	<i>The Groom Candidate</i> , Silhouette	87n			
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Winter Fire</i> , Avon			59n	27
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Amber Beach</i> , Avon			196	101
Debbie Macomber	<i>Three Brides, No Groom</i> , Silhouette			93n	76
Judith McNaught	<i>Remember When</i> , Pocket			15n	13
Sara Orwig	<i>Babes in Arms</i> , Silhouette	137n			
J.D. Robb	<i>Vengeance in Death</i> , Berkley				43n
Nora Roberts	<i>Finding the Dream</i> , Jove	90			
Bertrice Small	<i>Darling Jasmine</i> , Kensington	97n	101		

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