

Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 9, Number 3

March 1998

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NINC HITS SAVANNAH IN 99

You can see Savannah on screen in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and *The Gingerbread Man*, or see it in person when NINC's annual conference visits this beautiful, historic city in 1999.

As you all must know by now, John Berendt used Savannah as the backdrop for his amazingly successful non-fiction book, *Midnight in the Garden...*, but Savannah also has ties to Flannery O'Connor, Conrad Aiken, and songwriter Johnny Mercer, proving it has the power to fuel the creative imagination.

Plans are being finalized for Novelists, Inc. to meet at the Hyatt Regency Savannah from October 6 to 10, 1999, at the exceptional rate of \$125 per night, single or double.

The Hyatt Regency is located right on the Savannah River, in the heart of the Riverfront Historic District, opening directly onto a cobblestone street bustling with shops, restaurants, and nightlife. Many of the hotel's rooms have panoramic views of the river and its ships.

— **Julie Kistler**
'99 Site Chairman

MURDER + MAYHEM = MONEY Writing True Crime for \$\$\$

By **PATRICIA SPRINGER**

If you find real life stories more interesting than fictional ones, then true crime may be the genre for you. Not since the brutal murders of a Kansas farming family chronicled in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* has storytelling taken such an original turn. Today, real life stories are plucked from the headlines of newspapers and published in expansive, fiction-like detail.

To be specific, a true crime story is generally about a murder involving an investigation and (in most cases) a trial. There must be interesting characters, including the killer, detectives, lawyers, prosecutors, and most likely a sympathetic victim. Other characters often appear as well to make your story more lively. That's just what happened in my latest book, *Flesh and Blood*.

The murder of two small children in an upscale Dallas, Texas suburb set off a flurry of media attention when the boys' mother was arrested as the killer. The story was unusual enough when 26-year-old Darlie Routier was charged with capital murder but, as the case progressed, her family became an additional focal point of the story. As family members vied for media attention and succumbed to trading verbal insults with members of the District Attorneys' office, their side-show antics became an important element in the overall scheme of the book.

Most importantly, true crime must be a good story with compelling twists and turns and, as always, the story must be well written.

WHERE TO LOOK: Read the daily newspaper (if you aren't in the habit, you should be). It will be hard *not* to find a story about murder, kidnapping, rape, or a variety of other high profile crimes. You may want to subscribe to a second big town newspaper from another area of your state. Have your family and friends read their local newspapers and pass on potential stories. Take a little time to teach them what to look for (this saves them time—and you, too). My mom, who has become a wiz at searching out stories, regularly sends clips from the *Miami Herald*.

The TV talk shows and news magazine programs are a great source for crime stories, but, remember, if you saw it so did thousands of other writers. The competition can get tough.

Make friends with police, lawyers, and prosecutors. I am currently pursuing a story mentioned to me in passing by the crime scene investigator in my last book. He's thrilled with the possibility of again being mentioned for his fine investigative work, and I'm excited to be on the trail of another hot story.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

From the Front Lines

Novelists, Inc. newsletter deadlines being what they are, I'm actually writing this column in early February. Outside, a rare bright and warm midwinter day is coming to a close. This has been the gray season in Nashville. A few days ago, the local blow-dried news anchor read a story in which some weather mogul had crunched the numbers and discovered that, here in Music City, we had less than 24 hours of direct sunlight for the entire month of January. I took this as a sign to double up on the St. John's Wort.

This is the time of year when we all feel like we're having to slog through gray days. Like many of you—perhaps most of you—I take in freelance work (as opposed to taking in laundry) in order to supplement my writing income. So far this year, I've abridged five books for audiocassette publication, with one more in the queue. I don't mind the work, but it's tedious and it's not writing. My next book's due in July and I haven't started it yet. I have a short story due for an anthology in three weeks and can neither remember why I agreed to write the story in the first place nor what it's supposed to be about. My 72-year-old father just had his second surgery in less than a year. My accountant has confirmed that yes, indeed, last year's divorce was as financially devastating as I feared. And we won't even talk about the faded, smeared, meager 1099 I got from my agent last week....

Deadlines, aging parents, divorce, career pressures, business, and financial holes to dig out of—and to think we baby boomers used to be the party generation. My friends and colleagues overwhelmingly agree that being an adult is not all it's cracked up to be.

Curiously, though, I find myself looking forward to whatever comes next. At the end of 1997, I celebrated ten years as a full-time, self-employed novelist. I recently visited my last employer, the book publisher that laid me off in 1987 and forced me to try one more time to make it as a writer. I met with a couple of my old friends and colleagues who still struggle with corporate life. What that experience made me realize is that there is tremendous value in living life on one's own terms, even if in the process of doing so, one loses the safety nets and fringe benefits that others enjoy.

So as I anticipate the first spring of my second decade as a full-time novelist with great eagerness, I think about what I want to do and where I want to be. One of my main goals is to go back to the writing process determined to forget—at least while I'm in the process—that this is such a tough mother of a business. I didn't start writing because I thought it would be cool to schmooze with agents and editors and sign books for fans and sweat out royalty statements and cover art. I started writing because it brought me joy and passion and release. I want to find that again, and my hope for each of you is that you can tap into that as well. It's one of the few things that keeps us going as writers.

And in the meantime, there's always St. John's Wort.

This Month
from the
President:

*Life at midlife...
and
Good of the
order....*

A couple of quick NINC notes:

Judy Myers has agreed to take on the awesome job of coordinating the 1998 NINC Annual Conference in Tahoe this October. She is already up and running in an amazingly short amount of time and this conference is shaping up as one of the best ever. Any time you see, talk to, or encounter Judy or her team (Kathy Chwedyk, Shirley Parenteau, Vicki Lewis Thompson, Georgia Bockoven, and Julie Kistler) in any capacity whatsoever, thank them profusely. They deserve it.

We're still looking for an eager volunteer to chair the Internet Committee, replacing Alysse Rasmussen and giving her a well-deserved break. I hope by the time this is published, the post will be filled. But if it isn't, consider this an appeal for volunteers.

Before NINC, I didn't even know what reproduction rights were (and no, I'm not referring to the abortion de-

bate). The notion that writers can receive royalties from having their work Xeroxed is a foreign one to most American writers. But for writers in many other countries, it's an established right.

Here in America, the Author's Coalition—a group of 13 professional writers organizations—serves as the administrative body for moneys received from reproduction rights. This money is divvied out to individual groups based on the makeup of their membership. That's why it's vitally important that each NINC member return their Author's Coalition survey on time. You received the survey with your annual dues reminder. Your input helps the Author's Coalition share those funds fairly and accurately.

And that money helps NINC further the professional interests of all its members. So fill it out. Now! It's important.

— **Steven Womack**

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.

Praise for Editor Holmberg

Kudos to Anne Holmberg! Having worked with Anne on two articles for *Novelists' Ink* this past year, I can say that she was a wonderful editor: careful, insightful, and patient. All of us who worked with her and all of us who read *NINK* this past year owe her a big *thank you*. I have just read her last issue cover to cover and enjoyed every bit of it.

John-Allen Price's article was timely and well-taken. It is also the perfect complement to my series on Studio Publishing. Together, what our articles are saying is this: In the current commercial publishing climate, we writers need to take care of our financial lives, on both the personal and professional levels, in order to protect our writing lives. All of us in Novelists, Inc. either are or desire to be self-supporting writers, and John-Allen shows by his own example how he has secured his personal financial life in order to continue his writing life.

Articles by Elaine English are always welcome, and I learned a lot from her discussion of the "first sales doctrine" and used books. One sentence, in particular, caught my attention: "At this point, the case has yet to be made that the secondary sales market is so commercially valuable that it will have any impact on the creation of new works." Indeed, *no publisher* has bothered to make the case for regulating the secondary sales market, because it is not particularly valuable *to them*. They can always get the next new work on the cheap, as they have always done. The impact of the secondary sales market on the creation of new works falls exclusively on *the author*—which is surely one of the reasons why John-Allen Price's article is so timely and well-taken.

English points out that computers are changing things in the world of used books, but she doesn't imagine much change in the law until there are "commercial reasons" to change it. Now that on-demand printing can give instant accessibility to an author's backlist and given the continuing digitization of the industry, I think there are some pretty compelling "commercial reasons" from *the author's point of view* to start lobbying for the overhaul of the law concerning the "first sales doctrine" for books.

Finally, I can only agree with Evan Maxwell's assessment that 1997 was a watershed year for the publishing industry.

How much better I'm liking the flow of things now that I, the author, am more in control of the personal and professional finances that make my writing life possible!

— **Julie Tetel Andresen**

MURDER & MAYHEM

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 1*

Another tip: always act professionally. You'll find that most of the law enforcement personnel in your area know one another. I've had prosecutors set up interviews with police detectives for me, and police from one department vouch for me with police from another. My latest triumph came when a prosecutor spoke on my behalf to a defense attorney who consistently refused all requests for interviews with his client. Thanks to the prosecutor's good words, I got the interview. But beware, it can work in reverse just as easily.

Private investigators can be your best friends. Not only can PIs give you insight into a case they've worked, they can help with hard-to-get information not otherwise easily obtained.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR: There are certain elements that most true crime publishers are looking for: an interesting criminal, and a victim who has been chosen by the killer for some gut-wrenching reason—a victim the reader will feel sympathetic toward. An interesting location helps, and so does having a “setting” unknown to the reader (such as the fashion industry). People of money are appealing—especially those who kill. With some publishers, sexual deviation or obsession in your story can be a plus.

In almost all instances, the case must have come to conclusion. Someone caught. Someone convicted.

NOW WHAT? You've chosen your story and you're ready to write . . . or are you? There's a great deal of work to do before pen hits the paper—or fingers strike the keys. There are interviews to be conducted, trial transcripts to read (if you weren't lucky enough to attend the trial), and photos to gather.

I begin by reading every newspaper account of the incident that I can lay my hands on. Most high profile cases, and even some smaller ones, are often covered by more than one newspaper. If two reporters have been writing about the same story, you will more than likely glean great information from both. Let them fight it out in the trenches to get the tough-to-obtain interview or the tantalizing side story. You can sit back, read the papers, and reap the benefits.

I like to attend the trial whenever possible. You get a feeling for the characters. You can capitalize on their mannerisms and their emotions. I sat through four-and-a-half weeks of the Darlie Routier trial on a bench so hard that, by the end of the ordeal, my tail bone felt like it had moved

between my shoulder blades. Had I not been there, though, I could not have captured the media circus played out by the Routier family, or caught the volatile confrontation between the defendant and her attorney.

I realize in many cases the trial has already been conducted. That's when trial transcripts become invaluable tools. Transcripts are available for most murder trials, although not all. Check with the County Clerk where the incident occurred. In capital cases there is an automatic appeal, therefore a written transcript is made available to the Court of Criminal Appeals. In Texas, that's located in Austin. These documents fall under the Public Information Act and must be made available for anyone who wishes to view them.

Transcripts not only tell you what was said by witnesses but in most cases they will give you their addresses. They include the names of all jurors, lawyers, prosecutors, and the trial judge. If you're lucky, the transcript will also include crime scene photos and other exhibits presented during trial. All these are available not only for review, but also for photocopying to take home (great for reference-checking as you write the story). Only when an exhibit is sealed by the Court is access denied.

A friendly hint: arrive early at the office of the Appeals Court and go bearing donuts. You can't imagine how helpful the clerks are when they smell the scent of fresh baked pastry. And if you have one of those new briefcase-sized copiers, drag it along. Copies made at the Appeals Court (on their machine) can cost up to one dollar a page.

Personal interviews are essential to your true crime story. Talk with anyone who was even remotely connected with the case, including police detectives, paramedics (if they played an essential part in the story—as in the Routier case), expert witnesses, prosecutors, victim's family members, the perpetrator's family members, neighbors, friends, and anyone else who can give you insight into the victim, the defendant, or the crime.

When interviewing, remember to prepare a list of questions in advance, tape record every conversation, and go for the emotions. You want to know how they *felt*, not just what they *know*.

Be friendly—and generous. It's good business to buy a cop lunch, or take an essential source to dinner. Be prepared for any opportunity to get close to people connected with the case.

On the night the verdict came in for Darlie Routier, I crashed an impromptu celebration of some of the police officers who worked the case. The crime scene investigator or-

dered a cigar from the bar, only to be told they were out. I casually reached in my handbag (where a friend had stowed her stogies the previous week-end) and produced a small box of "lady-type" cigars. I said, "Have one of mine." He instantly relaxed, became very talkative, and ultimately became my best source of information.

Court room observers can also give you insight and add another dimension to your story. While attending the Routier trial, I made friends with one of the "courtroom junkies" from the local community. Her side-splitting antics added a little levity to an otherwise dismal tale, and generated more than one interesting anecdote for my book.

Not all writers agree, but I find it very important to talk to the perpetrator. Carlton Stowers, author of *Careless Whispers*, told me he never talked to the killers. I, on the other hand, find speaking to the perpetrator gives the story an added dimension.

For *Blood Rush*, I interviewed serial killer Ricky Green for two-and-a-half years before beginning the writing process. That book is a first-hand account of four brutal murders, but, more importantly, it is also an account of how Green was programmed to kill by the years of severe child abuse he endured. I could not have written *Blood Rush* without the cooperation and candor of Ricky Green.

If you want to talk to an inmate incarcerated in a state facility, contact the Public Information Office of the prison system. Each state has its own rules governing visitations with inmates. Corresponding with the inmate can give you a great deal of information, but there is nothing like sitting face-to-face with a convicted killer to gain real insight into the person.

Don't let the experience frighten you. I've talked with dozens of inmates on Texas's Death Row while looking for the next great story. The inmates are happy to have a visit from the outside world, and there is little risk involved—but play it smart. If you're going to correspond, get a post office box in a neighboring town. Although your killer may not be leaving prison without a toe tag, his family and friends could be nearby.

Photos are an essential part of any good true crime book and the one element that causes me the most frustration. Publishers want crime scene photos, pictures of victims, the perpetrator, family members, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, and any buildings or location shots fundamental to the story. The acquisition of these photos is time consuming and often expensive.

If you did not attend the trial and do not have photos of the main players, then they must be obtained from outside sources. Be aware that one photo from the Associated Press photo service could cost as much as \$100. I know a writer who paid \$1,000 for a single photo from the *Dallas Morning News*.

One of the best sources of pictures will be from the police files and the trial record. Family and friends of the per-

petrator and the victim may also be willing to provide photos. Always remember to obtain a release for any photos to be used in your publication which did not come from the trial record.

Once you've gathered your information, you're ready to tell the story. A simple chronology of the story isn't going to light a fire under your reader, so you must choose *what* to tell and *when* to tell it.

Paul Dinas, Senior Editor of Pinnacle Books, strongly suggests (okay, demands) that the story begin with the murder. It may be tempting to write two chapters of back story before killing off the victim, but your reader will have put the book back on the shelf by then and picked up another. Opening with the murder hooks the reader and holds them until you have them totally reeled in.

From that point, true crime resembles any novel filled with moving plot points, great characterizations, and vivid scenes. Even though your reader may know the outcome of the story before he reads the first page, you can make the story intriguing and suspenseful, as well as informative.

For true crime, there's a fine line between a good read and the truth, a necessary blend of journalism and entertainment. In an effort to touch your readers'

senses, you may be tempted to take "creative license" in your descriptions. But it's best to stay with the facts as closely as possible. It may not really matter to you or your readers what the killer was wearing, but it might to someone close to the story.

In *Flesh and Blood*, I wrote that Drake Routier, the youngest son of Darlie and Darin Routier, had deep brown eyes. Because no one in the Routier family would grant me an interview, I "guessed" at the eye color from a photograph I had taken of Drake at a public hearing. Well, as it turned out, Drake's eyes are dark blue. In interviews with the media, the Routier family used that one unimportant inaccuracy in an attempt to discredit the entire book.

Writing true crime is challenging and exciting. It can also be expensive. In most cases you are digging into your own pocket for motel rooms, air fares, and photos. Be cautious. Find stories close to home. I never, repeat *never*, pay for stories. Not to the perpetrator, not to sources.

Even with the downsides of costs, refused interviews, and keen competition, the thrill of the story is a tremendous draw.

So, if you're looking for something a little different to write, if you're intrigued with the human psyche, love research, and believe truth is often stranger than fiction—true crime may be exactly what you're looking for. **NINK**

Patricia Springer is the author of Blood Rush and Flesh and Blood. She is currently working on her third true crime story for Pinnacle Books. Patricia lives in Dallas, Texas.

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Tahoe  '98

Advance Yourself at the Retreat!

In 1997, Novelists, Inc. hit the Big Apple for a high-energy conference that drew more members for that event than ever before. Because we were on the home turf of many of the agents and editors, we flip-flopped our usual order of events and held our open-to-everyone Professional Sessions on Thursday and Friday before hunkering down on Saturday for the Members-Only Sessions and the eye-popping Art Show. It was a real change of pace, and it offered our members a chance to See and Be Seen in the City That Never Sleeps, as choreographed by the amazing and indefatigable Laura Resnick.

And now (as Monty Python would say) for something competely different.

The 1998 NINC Annual Conference will be held at Lake Tahoe, a locale which is about as far from New York temperamentally as it is geographically. From the time the early birds start arriving on Wednesday, October 14, until the last diehards leave on Sunday, October 18, we'll revel in the scenic splendor and clean mountain air of Incline Village, Nevada, on Lake Tahoe's North Shore.

Tahoe is the perfect place for a retreat, and so we'll return to our former schedule of starting with our Members-Only programs from Wednesday through Friday afternoon (including Night Owl Sessions and plenty of special surprises). Tentative plans are already in motion for session topics ranging from "creativity enhancement" to "better management of our personal resources (time and money)," as well as a Friday afternoon schedule filled with new ways to better yourself, to

pamper yourself, and to amuse yourself.

After that, bonded and refreshed, we'll welcome the agents and editors, beginning with the Friday night cocktail party and continuing through the Professional Sessions on Saturday. We'll also have a formal luncheon on Saturday, with a featured speaker. And, if I have my way, there will be a one-of-a-kind event on Saturday night that you won't soon forget.

By next month's *Novelists' Ink*, I'll be able to offer you more specifics. For now, just close your eyes and imagine a lake nestled like a blue jewel amid the Sierra Nevada mountains—the kind of place for which picture postcards were invented.

See it. Dream it. Then join me there in October.

— **Judy Myers,**
1998 Conference Coordinator

Tahoe  '98

NINC 1998 Conference Facts

Place: Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe, North Shore, Incline Village NV
Dates: Wednesday, October 14, thru Sunday, October 18
Contact: Judy Myers, Conference Coordinator
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Phone: 916-721-6863
(Monday through Saturday,
1:00 to 7:00 p.m. PST)

Literary Bunjee Jumping

I never read instructions. When I began writing fiction some 18 years ago, I went at that like I went at everything else: I plunged head-first into the deep end. Well, I had been a professor of English lit, hadn't I? The classics—that was all I needed to know. Determined to become an author, I got out a legal pad and a pen—not a pencil, mind you, but a pen—and sat down to produce a novel which would (please contain your laughter) be as celebrated as something by John Updike and would rival the sales of Stephen King. Lucky for me I didn't quit my day job.

Since I hadn't read the Little Writing Instruction book, I discovered only years later that most writers outline. It took me seven years and eight junked novels before I had any idea how to plot. Time-consuming failures. That's the first drawback to organic writing.

By organic writing I mean writing directly from the subconscious. No outline. No safety net. Only the vaguest of plans. Having some sketchy notion internalized (i.e., Faith! Inquisition! Alien abductions!), I urge the story to tell itself. When folks ask me what I do for a living, I tell them I jump off cliffs.

All novelists cliff-leap to some degree (if you have never considered full-time novelists as daredevils, ask yourself how many royalty checks you are away from financial disaster). And even more daunting than bank statements or IRS quarterlies is the challenge of the blank page. Writing consists of asking ourselves the dread question, "What happens next?" Thus, even though editing is accomplished with the logical part of the brain, the subconscious, with that question, weaves the tale.

For organic writers the process of creation is more accretion than plan, and it takes place over the course of the novel itself. We put ourselves at the mercy of an essentially illogical, chaotic force, and trust that it will create meaning.

I tell my students that the sanest way to write a novel is to outline. I warn my would-be authors of thrillers and mysteries that outlining will be nearly a requirement for their genre. I also admit, "But, if you simply can't work that way..."

The telling of the yarn is the thing. Story generation is so personal that it can never be taught; and interfering with the process should not be attempted, not by writing teachers, not by agents, not by editors. I'm talking about the very engine of creation.

The fiction-writing process is complex, occurring within the dark and disordered cave of the id. Some folks peer inside, see monsters, and flee. But among the chaos and those

By PATRICIA ANTHONY

***By organic writing I mean
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No outline.

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monsters lies the treasure of creativity. To extract it, I urge my students to explore every approach, from doodling to clustering to free-writing to dictating aloud. Anything goes, as long as it gets words on the page.

Over the years I have learned that some of my dearly held beliefs are nonsense. Story springs from character—that was a delusion I once held. Heck, writing's easy! thought I. Just get an interesting character. Have that character plunge into

life. Write down what happens. This was how I ended up with eight unsaleable novels—eight entire books without form or void.

Today my novels are known for being character-driven rather than plot-driven; but that's only because folks recognize two choices. The game has historically been seen as character versus plot. In truth, there are many drivers, and story happens to be mine.

Note that I define story as a different thing than plot. To me "story" is that titillating, can't-let-it-go emotion which keeps us trudging to the computer day after day. The carrot, if you will, to the stick that is our drudgery. Plot is merely the armature upon which story is draped.

Many a published author is character-driven. Somehow these folks make the improbable work. Yet I suspect that the seasoned veteran really begins with some inkling of story, no matter how small the seed. From this germ of an idea his or her protagonist springs.

I try to tailor my classes to the individual student. I teach outlining (although I suspect I'm not very good at it). I take pains to search for a particular student's interest, and I direct his or her work accordingly. I warn the students that, just as one cannot make an outliner from an organic novelist, the opposite also holds true. It comes down to this single fact: you either are, or you are not, organized.

Although I teach the organic process as one writing choice, I'm responsible enough to advise my students of the dangers. Abject terror is the worst disadvantage: the knuckle-biting, pulse-hammering fear that you don't know what happens next. Fear that you'll never finish. Fear that what you've written thus far makes no sense.

Some of these fears are mere bogeymen, but some of them are real enough. It takes practice to learn to trust your subconscious mind, to know that, although you have no idea what this particular character is doing in this particular story, he or she will eventually tell you. In *Flanders* (due out in May '98), I introduced a strong secondary character in my first chapter, a private brought into the British Army from a devastated Canadian unit. All I knew of ▶▶▶▶

Literary Bunjee Jumping

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 7*

LeBlanc was that he was just a little crazy and that he liked to brutalize women. Within my huge cast of British characters was a skilled people-manager, a Jew whom I knew was destined to face anti-Semitism, a captain (the commanding officer of my protagonist), and a homosexual. I knew that Captain Miller would eventually be executed by the British Army. I didn't know why. All I knew was that his execution would be a-cry-unto-God-sort-of injustice.

I was three-quarters finished with the manuscript when I realized that Captain Miller was going to shoot the wounded LeBlanc in cold blood. Miller would be executed, then, for trying to prevent a murderer from being sent home. During the course of the book we had seen a girl killed, two women brutalized. We knew that, because LeBlanc was a hero (the most decorated soldier in the battalion), the British Army had swept his crimes under the rug. Miller, being a righteous and moral man, was destined to slay that dragon which war had helped birth. From the beginning, LeBlanc's and Miller's fates were inescapable.

The organic writer creates an utterly tangible world for him or herself. We build it, we furnish it, we move in. I always ask writers how they "see" the world of their novel. Most tell me that it is like watching a movie. For organic writers (at least the ones whom I've interviewed), we step into that film which is our story. We, in truth, dream a dream.

Still, the key to the ending of each and every novel, be it organic or outlined, lies in its beginning (*Psst*. Does your ending sound clunky? Reread your first 20 pages). Here is how I believe this phenomenon occurs: Have you ever searched for a lost item and found it only when you had given up hope? I'll bet that you received your answer when you "zoned out" into alpha state. You arrive there by doing dishes (bummer) or by driving a familiar route (often dangerous) or by engaging in any sort of repetitive action. You had given your subconscious mind a task: Find the object. Your subconscious quietly,

doggedly worked on the problem; and when your conscious mind relaxed, your subconscious relayed the message.

It is a lengthy and frustrating process, working with your right brain. That's why organic story-telling takes place in increments, during the writing of the novel itself. That's why our book must proceed sequentially; and why we can never write a chapter out of place.

Story unfolds for us as life itself unfolds, in a myriad of tiny unforeseen occurrences.

Novels are self-fulfillment prophecies in action. "What the heck does this mean?" all writers ask. And whether we use our right brains or our left, eventually the question will be answered. Yet the fear of failure, the "can I pull this off?" haunts us all.

I tell folks that I wasn't manic-depressive until I started to write, and I'm only half joking. During the course of the novel we live on an emotional rollercoaster. We lose the ability to function in the real world. All of us have put the cell phone in the freezer—haven't we? (Please say yes.) Still, the neurosis goes even deeper for organics.

Readers sometimes ask me "Why" questions, i.e. "In *Cold Allies*, why did the aliens leave?" My only response can be, "Because that's what really happened." Our stories, as life itself, emerge as inviolate fact. Because of this process, the changing or editing of story becomes problematic. My fourth novel is a case in point.

Happy Policeman was an old novel and, as in all my early efforts, plot was the major problem, relying as it did on a *deus ex machina*. My editor and I were fond of the basic story, however, so I set out to re-do the end. Although I was ultimately successful (the novel was short-listed for the Clarke Award), the struggle was one which I have vowed never again to experience. In fact, it convinced me to go to my file cabinet and throw out all copies of my early, unsold works.

Most writers fall into some sort of middle ground, being neither truly organic nor strict outliners. I'm such a die-

There is nothing like the feeling of being dejected because you have no idea where you're going...when suddenly you have an epiphany... You've stumbled on the secret to the universe. The thrill is the most sustained, heady excitement I've known.

hard organic writer that I can't sell from a partial. I won't show a book to my agent or editor until it is complete. My financial analyst would prefer the usual method of business, but that's simply too dangerous, both for me and for my editor. It's unlikely that, 100 pages in, I will fully see the structure of my manuscript. I may not yet understand theme. I may not have any idea of how the thing will end.

Am I recommending this approach? Lord, *no*! If you are not currently an organic writer, please don't try this at home. Writing approaches are fundamental. You have trained yourself to write a certain way—stick to it! Still . . . do you hate to outline? Has a character ever surprised you? How close do you stick to your original synopsis? Good news! You're not nuts! You're simply a bit organic. As such, wondering if you're crazy (or disorganized or lazy) is perfectly normal behavior. It is also perfectly normal for your agent and/or editor to look at you at times askance.

If organic writing is so miserable an occupation, why do we do it? For the adrenaline high, of course! There is nothing like the feeling of being dejected because you have no idea where you're going, thinking that what you've written thus far should be used as a cat box liner, when—suddenly (as we say in the writing biz)—you have an epiphany. You've stumbled upon the secret to the universe. You phone your friends (they are accustomed to this by now) and you crow, "God! Of course! Harry is Anne's guardian angel!" or "Bernardo kills himself! And it's Pessoa's fault!" During the last hundred pages, when the whole thing begins to click into place for me and I'm writing as fast as I can type, the thrill is the most sustained, heady excitement I've known. That's why I write the way I do. I'm entertaining the hell out of myself.

For organics, when story clicks into place (if indeed it ever does) the result can be powerful. A cool novel, that's the tangible result. Here's the way I look at it: When I start a book I set out upon a journey of exploration. Perhaps I

will founder. Perhaps I will fall off the end of the world. But maybe, just maybe, I'll discover America. **NINK**

Patricia Anthony is one of the most critically acclaimed new science fiction writers of the decade. Her first novel, Cold Allies (1993), won a Locus Award and was named one of the Year's Best by Publishers Weekly. Her second, Brother Termite, has been adapted by John Sayles, with James Cameron to executive produce, David Cronenberg to direct. Her current novel, God's Fires, has been named one of the Year's Best by Publishers Weekly and the Washington Post Book World. Her seventh novel, Flanders, is due out in May of 1998. Pat teaches creative writing at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

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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.

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

Vicki Burgess (*Victoria Lynne*), Fairfax VA
Janet Ciccone (*Janet Lynnford*), Columbus OH
Robert Crais, Bel Air CA
Karen Fox, Fountain CO
Suzann Ledbetter, Nixa MO

Lynn Murphy (*Georgina Gentry*), Edmond OK
Vivienne Wallington (*Elizabeth Duke*), Victoria, Australia

New Members

Sharon Antoniewicz (*Shari Anton*), New Berlin WI
Patricia Knoll, Tucson AZ
Jackie Manning (*Jackie Summers*), Waterville ME
Carla Peltonen (*Lynn Erickson*), Aspen CO
Linda D. Ward (*Alana Clayton*), Louisville KY
Kathleen Webb, Brentwood Bay, BC, Canada



Advocacy Column: *At Issue for Writers Organizations*

This month we polled the writing organizations of the Authors Coalition for what their members feel are the hot issues facing writers in '98. The following are their responses:

From Olivia (Libby) Hall, President, Romance Writers of America

The Hot Issues our authors are the most concerned about are:

Internet sales by the publisher and how they are going to be treated, i.e., as direct sales which earn a much lower royalty rate or as retail sales.

The Internet itself and how it will or will not affect writers' careers and exposure to readers.

Electronic rights, royalties for such that will be fair to the author, plus contract clauses that will indemnify the authors for those extras added by the publisher or licensee.

Decreasing midlist and thus less opportunities for authors to publish and stay published.

From Walter Wager, President, Mystery Writers of America

Among the major concerns MWA writers report is access. For those who write for television, there is awareness that the percentage of US shows with mystery themes is less than it was. As one sage scribe noted in the newsletter of our Southern California chapter, the best way to get your mystery script aired is to move to Britain where there are many more hours devoted to such programs. Of course, our writers remain talented and undiscouraged, and some of our mystery shows are big hits in Britain and other markets.

For the book writers the access question is a bit more complex. It comes in several flavors. With publishing houses zeroing in more and more on possible big scores for possible best-sellers—and MWA writers contribute an impressive number of those regularly—the so-called “midlist writer” is being published less...with smaller advances...and less support. The latter is clear in candid comments by publishers that if a book doesn't get a substantial paperback or book club deal—up front from the publisher—there won't be a cent spent on advertising. “Building” a writer or a book is much less common these days. Indeed, some midlist writers whose works were reasonably but not hugely profitable for publishers over decades are having difficulties getting published at all.

All this makes it tougher for a new writer to break in with a first book. Even agents have grown harder for new writers who are our collective future.

In addition, some of the recent innovations in technology that were expected to generate income in which writers

would and should share are being manipulated by the greedy versus the need. Publishers of magazines and newspapers and some producers of TV and film are trying to deny writers fair income from electronic rights. If it were not for writers organizations' firm and creative resistance, a lot of income might be unfairly diverted from the creators.

Working together we can cope with these matters, informing legislators, media, and consumers so we can deal with these issues fairly. Perhaps an annual “summit” of writers organizations would help us focus and coordinate and get it done. There's a ton to do. There will be for decades to come.

From Kay Murray, Director of Legal Services, The Authors Guild

One hot issue in publishing is the state of the midlist book. Are writers of such works experiencing a crisis in getting their books published? A group of Authors Guild members is studying the situation. We expect the group's findings to be released by autumn.

In August, the Guild succeeded in having HarperCollins pay full advances for over 100 books it had canceled this summer. The issue of what remedies authors have when a publisher cancels is becoming acute for writers, as more publishers cancel book contracts as they merge or are acquired.

Electronic rights and copyright remain key issues for writers. The Guild is monitoring federal legislation that would change the scope of copyright on the Internet, and is ready to act to protect authors' interests in these important matters.

From Michael Capobianco, President, Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers

1998 will be a crucial year in the ongoing battle for writers' rights. In 1997, SFWA scored a few victories: we successfully fought Pocket Books to obtain payment for *Star Trek* books being shipped to the UK and Australia; when TSR stopped paying royalties, we fought to make them pay what they owed; and we have identified and publicized the existence of a foreign literary agent who was ripping off our members by selling their works and keeping the money.

By far our biggest campaign, the fight against the new flat fee *Star Wars* contract offered by Bantam, was not conclusively won. LucasFilm ended its relationship with Bantam and awarded all future *Star Wars* fiction to Ballantine/DelRey. Ballantine has indicated that it will pay royalties on *Star Wars* books, but, until we have proof positive, we must consider the matter still unresolved.

In 1998, we will continue to pursue our “Writers De-

serve Royalties" effort and will be prosecuting the foreign literary agent. We will be working to assure that sf and fantasy publishers use fair electronic rights and indemnity clauses in their contracts. We will be attempting to stop the resale of US magazine rights to foreign anthologies under the guise of "foreign editions" without additional compensation to authors. SFWA has created a "Credits and Ethics" Committee to recommend a set of rules to ensure fair bylines for unequal collaborations and ghost-written material.

We have opened a discussion on the role of literary agents in publishing, and are looking into the proliferation of fake and fraudulent agents in the field. With the rise of organizations such as Edit Ink, it's time to make clear to beginning writers that anyone can call themselves an agent without credentials or influence. Several sf and fantasy editors have stated that they will not look at unagented manuscripts; this pushes some of our members directly into the hands of the crooks, because it is nearly impossible for a beginning writer to attract a reputable agent. SFWA will be attempting to influence these editors to look at unagented manuscripts from our members, at least. We have also asked our counsel to investigate NY State case law concerning literary agents to clarify some of the ambiguities in the author-agent relationship.

Our Grievance and Random Audit Committees will continue to do their work to combat "stupid publisher tricks." Our Contracts Committee has just completed a model magazine contract, and our Work Made For Hire Committee is working on a model WMFH contract. SFWA has stepped up efforts to increase the size of our Emergency Medical Fund, which loans members money to pay for medical expenses.

SFWA is growing, and we have at last hired a full-time Executive Director to help us move forward. One of her first goals is to find an acceptable group health insurance plan for our members. She will also be investigating the newly created Medical Savings Account law and providing information to our members about this new option. On the internal front, SFWA's Board of Directors will soon present an updated and corrected set of Bylaws to our membership for ratification.

From Michael Sullivan, Treasurer and Representative to the Authors Coalition, Textbook Authors Association

We have several concerns, none unique to 1998.

The sale of used textbooks: We feel that the sale of used textbooks should generate royalties back to the author. We also don't like the practice of some professors who, upon receiving complimentary copies of textbooks from the publisher for evaluation, turn around and sell the books to a used book distributor and pocket the money.

"Fair use" under the copyright law and reprography fees: Right now, "fair use" allows libraries and universities to photocopy textbooks at will without paying copying fees to the publishers and authors. We would like to see a fee charged in this country for all photocopying of copyrighted material whether it is used for instructional purposes or not.

Electronic rights: What sort of royalties should be paid if a book is in electronic rather than print form (which is the way text books will be utilized in the next five to ten years)? Should the university be licensed to reproduce at will any part or totality of a textbook with the licensing fee based upon the student population? How is the author compensated when a book is distributed in that fashion? Some publishers believe the royalties should be paid at the same rate as text, but others feel electronic textbooks are more expensive and the author should receive less. Still other publishers suggest our industry wait and see how electronic textbooks are used before discussing author compensation.

From Lewis Bachman, Executive Director, Songwriters Guild of America

1998 will be an important year for SGA in Congress with a tremendous amount of activity squeezed into a very few short months. The new legislative session is just starting and because this is an election year Congress will adjourn in October.

Our most important task is to move the Copyright Term Extension Legislation, HR 2589. This legislation, when passed, will protect many valuable copyrights (of music and other copyrighted material) written in the middle 1920s from falling into the public domain by providing for another 20 years of protection, as well as extending the copyright term for post-1977 works to life plus 70 years. (*Ed. note: the present copyright term is life plus 50 years.*) The House Judiciary Subcommittee unanimously approved the bill and awaits action by the full Committee. The Senate version, S.505, is also pending in Committee. Due to international complications, this legislation is needed to provide comparable copyright terms throughout the world and continue to provide a positive balance of payments.

Term Clauses Sought

Please check your author-agent contracts for a Term and Termination clause which reads "The term of this Agreement shall be for the term of copyright in the Work, including all the renewals and extensions thereof, or for as long as any compensation is received from the exploitation of the Work..." The Authors Guild would like a list of agents who have this or a similar clause in their agency agreement.

If you have such a clause in your contract, please contact Cathy Maxwell at the e-mail and number below. Thank you.

If you have a topic or question you would like to see addressed in this column, please contact Cathy Maxwell, 804-744-3376, cmaxwell@bellatlantic.net.



EAST OF THE HUDSON

Here We Go Again

To no one's great surprise, Viacom, the cable television biggie, has put the bulk of its Simon & Schuster publishing operation on the sales block. In an age when publishing houses regularly implode and consolidate, in an era when authors have seen potential big-market outlets shrink from several dozen to four or five, the move didn't come as a surprise. Viacom chief Sumner Redstone probably moves his lips when he reads; what the hell does he need with a bunch of companies that punch out books?

But the initial terms of the deal are a sad commentary on American publishing and therefore worthy of note. At the beginning of the sales process, Viacom intended to peddle its professional, educational, and reference divisions. Those divisions generate annual revenue of \$2 billion and are thought to be the most profitable sectors of the business.

But S&S intended to hang onto the publishing division which only generates \$550 million a year in sales and which deals in the most problematic and least profitable books on the shelf, general fiction and nonfiction.

That's right, folks. Viacom intended to peddle the lucrative, sure-thing divisions but to hold onto S&S trade and children's divisions, Pocket Books, and a few other scraps.

The reasoning? It's called "synergy." Redstone said he figured he could use the trade arm to market books which were tied to Viacom's other entertainment operations, principally MTV and Nickelodeon, the cable television networks.

In other words, the book business is attractive only so long as it dovetails into the electronic marketplace. By themselves, books are of only limited interest to the corporate bigwigs who make America the grand and wonderful place it is today.

For two reasons I was surprised that Redstone and his bean-counters wanted to retain S&S/Pocket at all. First, the house has not been a go-go kind of place in the last few years. While it has done okay by publishing standards, its return on investment and growth rate have both been dinky, compared to cable television, where 25 percent growth rates and double-digit profit margins are the standard.

Second, trade books are real risky little devils; lots of them don't even earn back what they cost. As a businesslike publisher, you are required to get down on your knees regularly to pray for that single big hit that will make you well.

Guys like Redstone don't like to kneel; it ruins the

creases in their chalk-stripe suits. So I was skeptical about the early reports of the Viacom offer.

My skepticism was warranted. Within a week of the first S&S announcements, there were public suggestions that maybe S&S/Pocket would be on the block as well, that Viacom might be willing to peddle the whole kit and caboodle.

Publishers Weekly outlined the difficulties of retaining the trade division. Any purchaser of the other parts might have difficulty disentangling the overall corporation's so-called back-office operations—legal, corporate communications, customer service, and financial systems—from the S&S structure. One way out might be a joint-venture deal with some other publishing house—Bantam/Doubleday/Dell has been mentioned—but BDD didn't sound terrifically interested.

As of this writing, the shape of any S&S deal was still obscure, but the entire exercise is a reminder of the fact that writers' fates are tied to those of corporate America. Such business arcana as "back-office operations" have significant impact, even on we lowly wordsmiths. You can't publish books today without the kind of corporate support mechanism that would make Charles Dickens blanch and Ernest Hemingway's knees tremble. If we wish to make a living from our words and stories, we are dependent on literally hundreds, even thousands, of folks whose efforts we never see.

In other words, we are all partners, after a fashion, with Sumner Redstone and his ilk, unless we want to write for the more or less pure joy of it. So let's wish Sumner well in his quest. After all, if he manages to raise, say, \$4 billion in cash by selling off his stable of ink-stained wretches, he might just be able to retire the debt on his other contributions to cultural life in the late 20th century: MTV, Nick at Nite, and the Blockbuster video stores.

I Told You So, I Told You So

Seems to me I wrote a little warning some time ago about so-called editorial services which offer to help aspiring authors polish their work into salability.

I may even have mentioned Edit Ink, an outfit in upstate New York.

Well, it seems that Edit Ink has now been shut down by court order and is being sued by the New York Attorney General's office. The civil suit charges the firm with defrauding writers to the tune of perhaps \$5.5 million.

Here's how the operation looked from the outside, according to *PW*: Edit Ink offered editorial advice to authors,

ostensibly from a whole stable of seasoned professionals who smoked pipes and sat discussing good writing by the hour when they weren't busy straightening out some promising writer's garbled syntax. Only promising writers were solicited; they had to be pretty close to publishable for Edit Ink to even accept them as clients.

Imagine, if you will, that you are an aspiring author convinced that you are as good as John Grisham. You just need a break, maybe a little coaching, and you'll be off to bestsellerdom. To a person in that circumstance, Edit Ink must have sounded like Maxwell Perkins come back from the dead.

The legal pleadings make the reality of Edit Ink look quite different from that glowing vision. The New York authorities allege that Edit Ink advertised widely in writer's magazines, but they trolled up other potential marks by collecting the names of rejected authors from ostensibly respectable literary agents. The editorial service is even alleged to have paid those agents for referrals. (In some circles that's called a "bounty," I think.)

According to *PW*, the operation oiled up the writers by saying their work was promising, just in need of a little fine-tuning. That fine-tuning had a price: five bucks a page. A high price, perhaps, but how much would *you* pay for fame and glory?

The crusher, though, was that it was all phony, according to *PW*. "Though the manuscripts were not even looked at..., the authors were then told that their work was unpublishable after all."

Edit Ink is no longer in business, thanks to the New York authorities. Good, say I.

And if I didn't write an item about them some time ago, I intended to. Those people cost me almost....

Oh, forget it.

Politics as Usual

Politics is defined as the art of cloaking one's own self-interest in the glowing raiment of good public policy. (Okay, it's my definition, but it makes perfect sense, so there.) In that spirit, let's take a look at the newest flap between independent booksellers and the giants, in this case BarnesandNoble.com and Amazon.com, the online folks.

In a blast of hot palaver worthy of US Senator Phineas T. Foghorn, independent booksellers are now charging that online booksellers have conspired with publishers to deprive the indies of copies of books that suddenly become hot titles. The logic behind the charge gets a little twisted, friends, so pay attention.

The independent booksellers are up in arms about their increasing difficulty obtaining copies of books that unexpectedly become, if not bestsellers, at least good sellers. The titles involved are often literary or academic, they are often published by small or university presses, and they are the type of book that is expected to sell a few thousand copies.

But once in a while, one of these titles connects with the reading public. A *New York Times* Book Review section

front-page review can do it. So can an appearance on any number of television shows. (Did somebody just use the "O" word?)

When lightning does strike one of these books, orders take off and booksellers scramble around trying to find copies to sell at full price. But, according to some independent stores, when the lightning strikes, they suddenly find themselves at the tail end of the supply line.

The culprits, according to the indies, are those online bookstores which gobble up the limited supplies of such books. The indies also allege that publishers connive with these big retail outlets by tipping them off, *ahead of time*, to publicity that may stimulate demand for the title.

The little independents claim that, since the biggies order copies in large numbers, the available supply in the publishers' warehouses and in wholesaler stocks dries up quicker than spit in the desert. True, the publisher will probably get around to a second printing, if demand is really high, or it will fill back orders from returns, when they finally begin to dribble back from the stores. But in the meantime, the indies are losing sales and customers are flocking to online outlets who deliver in 48 hours or less.

(Got that? Good for you! I told you it was tortured.)

"Since Barnes & Noble has had a link on the *New York Times* Web pages, books are immediately out of stock," one indie told *Publishers Weekly*. "Before the link, I never had problems getting books for autographing parties. Now, after a book is reviewed in the *Times*, people come in and tell me they can't find it anywhere except Barnes & Noble."

The same charge is made against the Seattle-based online bookseller Amazon.com. "Once anything gets any review attention or media attention at all, Amazon has been clearing out the wholesalers," another indie alleged.

PW did acknowledge that there may be other factors at work, particularly the current trend toward smaller and smaller print runs. Most publishers are cutting runs to the bone and, in some cases, even refusing to do additional printings no matter what the demand. They expect to fill back orders out of returns, or to miss a few sales, all for the sake of raising sell-through figures. The tactic does wonders for a publisher's bottom line, but it can hurt both booksellers and writers in the short as well as the long run.

PW, which consistently spouts the party line of independent booksellers, gave great credence to the complaints of the smalls. So does the American Booksellers Association. Avin Domnitz, director of the ABA, suggested that the situation raises both antitrust and Constitutional issues: "Whenever access to First-Amendment-protected material is provided to a limited number of vendors, the ultimate harm is done to the reading public and the culture," he said.

Sounds like a job for Diamond Bill Rehnquist and the Supremes.

In the past, the indies have been quick to find conspiracies when there may be none. I don't blame them for being angry. It has to be very frustrating for a bookseller to have unfilled orders. But I think they are motivated by self-interest more than by a love of the free marketplace or even of the Constitution of the United States of

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EAST OF THE HUDSON

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America. That is why I think Domnitz should save his histrionics for the big ones.

On the other hand, there's a related trend that is worthy of concern. I first saw it last summer when the *New Yorker* magazine reported that Barnes & Noble was developing plans to market their own private-imprint books more aggressively in their stores.

In merchandising terms, that's a double whammy. The company would profit both from the publication and from the sale of a book. The potential problem is this: B&N will suddenly have a real incentive to prefer B&N books over those of, say, the publisher of my stuff.

I wondered at the time about the possibilities. Then, late last year, I ran across another troubling allegation. Afro-American booksellers complained that they had been unable to get copies of a new book by an author who had been a quiet bestseller for them for years.

Instead of being allocated to its traditional markets, most of the author's first print run allegedly went to the superstore folks. Little booksellers had to wait for weeks for copies and by then, the market had been thoroughly creamed.

The coverage of that flap was inconclusive. Both superstore and publisher denied the booksellers' allegations and that was pretty much the last anyone heard of it. But I got to thinking and putting things together in my head, and then I read about this newest flap. Maybe the indies have a point, after all, even though they have buried it beneath gobs of political *bushwah*.

I am not a great fan of the kind of self-interested elitism we often hear from the independent booksellers. Folks like them have sneered far too often at the kinds of books I like.

I am also not a great fan of concentrated corporate power of the sort that could be at work here. There is a natural tendency on the part of the powerful retailer to extract as many concessions as possible from his suppliers. That natural tendency may work against the long term self-interest of writers, whose plight is even more pitiable than is the plight of the indies.

What we need is less squabbling over who gets how many of which titles, and more support of more authors. Given that, cultural diversity, free speech, the Constitution, and motherhood are protected. I promise.

Shape of the Future?

We have mused together here, you and I, about the sorry state of the book business. We have wondered if

there is any business form that will be able to take the place of the jolly old days when a dozen hardback houses and that many more paperback reprinters were out there bidding against one another for our latest works.

Ah, yes, the golden days.

Well, friends, I've come to the conclusion they ain't gonna be coming back any time soon. We're stuck, like it or not, with a handful of potential outlets, all of whom are cutting their lists and swinging for the *NYT* bestseller fences on every pitch.

But here's a little ray of sunshine in the form of an indication that an old delivery mechanism is showing new vigor. That mechanism? Book clubs.

Now wait a minute. Don't go ballistic quite yet. I understand that book clubs are not always a writer's friend. Some publishers even use their own, captive book clubs to extract even larger profit margins at the expense of authors. (No names, here. Just a few fingers pointed in the direction Santa Claus lives.)

On the other hand, book clubs are becoming a strong means of reaching niche reader markets, the sort of markets genre writers need to make a living.

The basic facts: Between 1990 and 1996, book club sales have increased by about 50 percent, according to the *New York Times*. Annual sales are now at \$1.1 billion. More importantly, the growth has not been in the big, general interest clubs but rather in the ones that serve niche markets like Christian fiction, history, science fiction, New Age, mystery, and romance.

"In these markets, you're much less dependent on the megasellers," Marcus Wilhelm of Doubleday Direct told the *Times*. "The book clubs are providing an additional service by picking and choosing the right book for each interest group, and that's still in demand today."

General interest clubs aren't doing so well. Discount stores and warehouse clubs compete aggressively with the Book of the Month Club, for instance, discounting the Grishams and Clancys and Steels deeply and offering stacks of titles for hands-on inspection.

But the special interest clubs allow for much greater customization, which means greater success at connecting with disparate readers' tastes. Doubleday Direct, for instance, offers more than 100 versions of its monthly catalogue, all tailored to distinct reading interests and aimed at people who don't have the time to wander the aisles of the superstores, looking for just the right thing to read.

The book club concept has a bad reputation. It has been disparaged by critics and *intellectuals* (cq) for fostering middle-brow tastes and supporting middle-brow writers. The pointy-heads want readers to explore, try new authors, read experimental forms.

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Maybe that's a worthy goal, but I think it's unrealistic. I can tell you from personal experience that my history reading tastes are guided by the History Book Club, whose bulletins are very helpful in screening out the most esoteric tomes and helping me select books I am really likely to find the time to read.

And as a writer, I am impressed by the prediction that book clubs may sell \$1.5 billion worth of books to their readers by 2001. The number suggests that the publishing

business is getting smarter and more diverse at the same time.

Being a brand-name writer or a BOMC-selected author would be nice, but I am heartened by the idea that there may still be an effective way of reaching niche readers.

And whatever else happens, I can assure you that the book-club clauses in my new contracts are going to be examined more closely than they used to be.

— *Evan Maxwell*



ONLINE

Since last month's column focused on the perils of the online world, this time around I'll talk about something particularly good: making actual money on the Internet. (And no, I don't mean those get-rich-quick spams you keep receiving, either!) A fair number of writers have discovered ways to supplement their incomes using their modems, either by soliciting business online or by actually selling services over the Internet. Novelists, Inc. member Mary Kilchenstein, for example, advertises her editing service, Future Perfect, via her Web site (www.prosight1.com/futureperfect). "The site has only been up a month," she says, "so I haven't seen much action from it—two clients, to be exact—although it appears to be getting visitors...I do make money at freelance editing. How much of that money over the next year is going to be from Internet contacts, I don't know yet."

A few authors mentioned writing articles for online publications, though most of those work on a barter system, offering free ad space or subscriptions in exchange for contributions. Still, if those are things you're already paying for, it's worth considering. A couple of others operate online bookstores from their Web sites, either selling directly, or as **Amazon.com** associates.

Jennifer Dunne's online bookstore at <http://members.aol.com/sfreditor/bookstor.htm> brings in about \$30/quarter from **Amazon.com** and is tied to the Web site for her *Science Fiction Romance* newsletter. She uses that revenue to offset her publicity costs.

Teaching writing classes or tutoring aspiring writers online seems to be the most lucrative option (right now) for authors looking to supplement their incomes on the Internet. Several NINC members teach classes via the Painted Rock Web site at www.paintedrock.com, which pays a per-student fee to instructors.

Judith Bowen teaches writing classes via www.writers.com, and also tutors students one-on-one. Similarly, Diana Fox teaches at Painted Rock and also conducts one-on-one synopsis and query classes. Diana is also listowner of *Scribelink* for serious screenwriters

(e-mail dfox@rose.net for more info). I teach several writing classes via America Online myself, and have found it quite profitable, if time-consuming.

Daphne Clair has an online "flyer" for courses that she and Robyn Donald run physically in New Zealand, and has recently seen an increase in e-mail applications for the course, so that's something else to consider.

All of these activities tend to take away from writing time, of course, but at least they don't require leaving home (or even your computer) the way an outside job would. And in these lean market times, every little bit helps!

Speaking of income, tax time approacheth. Here's a Web site you might want to visit before hunkering down with that flurry of forms: NINC member Linda Kay West just happens to be an IRS tax attorney, and has included her article "Authors and the Internal Revenue Code" at www.eclectics.com, where she has her Web page. It's an amazingly thorough article—well worth saving for future reference—and even includes a link to the IRS site, where you can download any tax forms you need.

NincLink has been fairly active lately, generating discussions on such topics as phone company charges for Internet service, writers as readers, books on tape (including a lively debate on the merits of abridged versus unabridged), NINC '98 conference suggestions, more music to write by (Loreena McKennitt seems to be a particular favorite), and yet another flurry of posts on grammar—particularly its abuse by the media—and colorful regionalisms.

Remember, to subscribe to NincLink, just send an e-mail:

To: **Majordomo@ninc.com**

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

If you run across any interesting online news or Web sites, please e-mail me at **BrendaHB@aol.com**. See you online!

— *Brenda Hiatt Barber* :)





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>**

Members who write under pseudonyms should notify Marilyn at any of the above "addresses" to assure their listing in "Fast Track."

Member	Title	Jan 1	Jan 8	Jan 15	Jan 22	Jan 29
Sandra Brown	<i>Temptation's Kiss</i> , Warner Vision	194	103			
Stella Cameron	<i>The Best Revenge</i> , Zebra		74n	91		
Jude Deveraux	<i>An Angel for Emily</i> , Pocket				13n	15
Suzanne Forster	<i>Husband, Lover, Stranger</i> , Berkley				96n	82
Linda Howard	<i>Kill and Tell</i> , Pocket	74	24	31	73	74
Iris Johansen	<i>Long After Midnight</i> , Bantam		128n			
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Sharp Edges</i> , Pocket				71n	60
Kat Martin	<i>Dangerous Passions</i> , St. Martin's Press		217	84		
Anne McCaffrey	<i>Dragonseye</i> , Del Rey			38n	25	36
Anne McCaffrey	<i>The Masterharper of Pern</i> , Del Rey			230	68	86
Susan Elizabeth Phillips	<i>Dream a Little Dream</i> , Avon			26n	16	32
Nora Roberts	<i>Sea Swept</i> , Jove	40	10	17	46	44
Nora Roberts	<i>The Calhoun Women: Catherine and Amanda</i> , Silhouette	225	37	43	69	77
Nora Roberts	<i>Secret Star</i> , Silhouette			146n	26	76

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