

Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 9, Number 5

May 1998

STAB THAT VILLAIN! ***(Researching Traditional Weapons and Combat)***

By **LAURA RESNICK**

When I was writing contemporary romance novels, I would occasionally write a hero or villain who carried a gun, perhaps even fired it. Although I knew nothing about guns, I found it relatively easy to research what kinds of guns to assign to these characters, what they would do with them, and what the effects would be. I consulted gun enthusiasts. I read some of the gun-and-rifle magazines which are abundantly available and full of detailed, well-illustrated articles recommending various weapons for various needs (do you want to shoot an intruder at night, or do you want to storm the Pentagon?).

I read nonfiction books by law enforcement officers and private detectives. I investigated research books like those in the *Writer's Digest* "Howdunit Series." I asked medical people about the effects of getting shot (don't ever shoot your hero in the large intestine; trust me on this). I went to a firing range and fired a few guns so that I could accurately describe the smell, sound, and feel of shooting one (damn scary, in case you were wondering).

However, when I started writing fantasy novels, things got more complicated. Whatever the unique specifics of the individual story, all heroic fantasy novels tend to be about

good triumphing over evil—usually after lots and lots of effort and sacrifice—in a setting devoid of technology (i.e. no guns, stealth bombers, or Windows '95).

Well, you try triumphing over

evil in a 250,000-word novel without any action scenes. I'm telling you, it can't be done. And even though, hey, I grew up in the mean streets of Blue Ash, Ohio, I soon realized that I didn't know enough about traditional weapons (sword, knife, dagger, staff, etc.) to write about them convincingly, particularly not as the possessions of characters who used them on a daily basis.

I wasn't just concerned about fighting techniques, though this was obviously important, but also about all aspects of these weapons as part of characters' daily lives. Where would you get them? How would you care for and maintain them as functioning tools in your life? Are they any good at slicing bagels? And so on.

But get this—no one of my acquaintance, not even my most right-wing friends, keeps a sword around the house to use on burglars! I've yet to speak to a medical person who has treated a sabre wound. There is no local equivalent of Target World where I can find out what it's like to wield a claymore at a target which looks, if I really concentrate, a bit like my Uncle Tommy (who once tried to drown me; but I digress).

And my initial search for written materials only discovered books and magazines which treated swords and daggers as precious collectors items to be polished, insured, and kept under glass—something which wouldn't be useful or practical for characters using their weapons on a daily basis in the fictional war-torn society about which I was writing (a society which doesn't even have Ben & Jerry's, never mind glass cases). What was I to do?

I put out a cry for help, asking other writers to recommend good research sources, but I received relatively few replies. In fact, one writer whose weaponry-writing I enjoyed even wryly admitted to "faking it" for years and asked me to pass along the names of any good reference works I managed to dig up.

So I began educating myself. Like Madonna, I made it through the wilder-

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Novelists, Inc.

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Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

When T.S. Eliot wrote in his 1922 epic poem, *The Waste Land*, that "April is the cruelest month," I doubt very seriously that he had the same notions about April that I have. Since embarking on the writing life, I've found that April is, indeed, the cruelest month, for it's during this first full month of Spring that we all settle up with the IRS. And for writers, that settling up is a severe one indeed.

I've often wondered, for instance, why if one digs a gas well and that gas well produces income, the money received is considered a royalty. However, if a writer writes a book and that book—an entity entirely separate from the writer which, once written, requires less maintenance than the oil well—produces revenue, then that money is considered earned income. And as we all know, earned income is income that pays three different taxes: income tax, Social Security (tax), and in the case of self-employed writers, the dreaded and loathsome "Self-Employment Tax."

In other words, royalties for writers are treated quite differently than royalties for gas or oil well owners, as well as landlords and leaseholders. It doesn't seem fair.

And as many of you know, the ultimate unfairness is the aforementioned Self Employment Tax, which combined with the Social Security contribution, is now in the range of an extra 16 percent over and above the income tax. I've never been able to figure out why in a capitalist society whose very economic engine is primed by entrepreneurial efforts, that those entrepreneurs are penalized in ways that General Motors, IBM, and Microsoft aren't. Writers and artists are the ultimate entrepreneurs; we make something out of nothing and sell it to the world. As my first literary agent once told me, writing is the only business you can get into with an investment of less than five dollars (a ream of typing paper) and get rich.

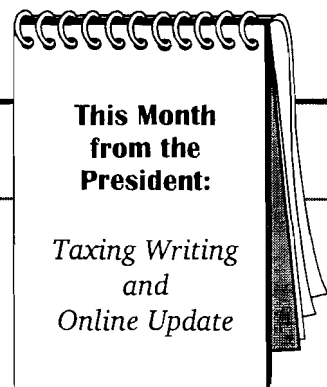
It's not only the tax itself, but the agonies inherent in filing the return. Several years ago, I had income from either three or four different countries and had paid foreign income tax in one of those countries. I was married then and my spouse was self-employed as well, plus we had sold one house and bought another. Our tax return that year ran a whopping 76 pages, counting all the worksheets. It took the better part of a full week to prepare and uncounted cups of coffee and bottles of antacids. After awhile, the whole mess became surreal.

Unfortunately, until genuine tax reform takes place—if it ever does—there's not much we can do about it. I wish you all luck and patience. And remember, it's only another couple of months until taxpayer liberation day....

▼ ▼ ▼

On the Internet front, the latest news is that by the time you read this, NINCLINK may have already moved to its new server. If it hasn't, the process is underway. It seems the level of complaints regarding the digest has risen to a point where it simply can't be ignored. Please bear with us; we're doing our best to clean up this mess as quickly as possible.

— Steven Womack



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.

Missing NINK?

Missing an issue of *NINK*? Didn't receive your subscription copy? Contact the Central Coordinator, Randy Russell, for replacement [not the editor].

Novelists, Inc.
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Mission KS 66222-0166



NINK NOTES

Roster Corrections Update

Due to a problem with the database (which I believe has been fixed), a number of changed items during the year reverted to their former status. Double check your own entry and if it's wrong, let me know at COZYBOOKS@AOL.COM or my snail mail address: Box 1122, Mission KS 66222. I need to receive corrections by May 10 in order to insert a correction sheet in the June newsletter.

— *Janice Brooks*

Nominating Committee to Meet

The Nominating Committee will soon be meeting to select candidates for the 1999 slate of officers. We will be selecting candidates for President-Elect, Secretary, and Treasurer, as well as preparing a slate of candidates for the Nominating Committee.

Please consider placing your name into consideration for one of these positions and/or suggesting someone you feel would be an excellent choice. We'll also be making suggestions to the board for the positions of Newsletter Editor and Assistant Editors.

Send your suggestions to the Nominating Committee Chair: Victoria Thompson, 563 56th Street, Altoona, PA 16602, 814-942-2268, <vestinpa@aol.com>.

Deadline: May 31.

— *Victoria Thompson*

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

Layle Giusto, St. Albans NY
Carolyn McSparren, Collierville TN
Timothy Taylor, Hendersonville TN

New Members

Christine Bush Mattera (*Christine Bush*), Doylestown PA
DeWanna Pace (*Dia Hunter*), Amarillo TX
Cheryl Anne Porter, Valrico FL
Lynette Vinet, Hammond LA

Returning Member

Laura DeVries (*Laura Gordon*), Grand Junction CO

Finding True Believers

By EVAN M. FOGELMAN,
Literary Agent

I have been asked to comment on the changing market, and to place particular emphasis on what authors can do to adapt and survive. Let me begin by saying that ever since the development of the trade book market as a commercial proposition, it has always been in a state of flux. So, the so-called bad news is nothing novel (pun intended). Only now, with the existence of well-functioning writers' groups and the dissemination power of the Internet, concerns about book publishing are spread faster and wider than ever before.

Yes, it is true that trade hardcover sales slumped last year—but mass market sales are actually higher. And, with the advent of on-line bookselling, returns, which have threatened publisher revenues (and thus author royalties)

Standards and practices are slowly but surely becoming more author friendly...a testament to the businesslike, professional attitudes of authors, which has dramatically improved over the past few years.

since the Great Depression, may be finally losing some of their toxic economic effects. All in all, I believe most authors of mass market fiction, especially romance, have several reasons to be optimistic.

First, getting your manuscript into the hands of the right acquisition editor has never been easier. Just take a look at the number of cogent author organizations

designed with the goal of having and keeping members well-published. During all my travels I have never been to a single town—no matter how small—where I couldn't find at least one writers' group. And I'm not talking about critique organizations—I mean RWA chapters, mystery writers' groups, or less formal affiliations whose main purpose is to help members become published and keep publishing. From this perspective, things look pretty bright. Each year my agency receives more publishable material—including historical romances—than we received during the preceding year. And, while it has been difficult from time to time to have published authors' option material picked up *without revision*, never have we seen so many editors *so willing* to work with these authors in getting new books acquired.

Second, despite what you may have heard, standards and practices are slowly but surely becoming more author friendly. Of course there will always be some imbalance in the negotiating stances between multimedia corporate conglomerates and individual authors, but, as a lot, authors today are much more savvy than their counterparts of a decade ago, and I see many publishers treating them accordingly. For example, this year author splits on subsidiary rights have uniformly been presented by publishers higher than I've seen them in a decade. This is not a testament to the power of agents, but rather to the businesslike, professional attitudes of authors, which has dramatically improved over the past few years.

Third, speaking of agents, as far as I can tell, there are now more legitimate, successful literary agents at work than in any other year in publishing history. Though agents cannot guarantee good publishing deals for authors, there certainly are more of us working harder than ever. And that translates into more submissions and often better acquisitions for writers. To the extent editors rely on agents to provide a bottom-line of submission quality, author opportunities abound. Yes, it is still difficult to get an agent, but it is not as difficult as it once was. Nor should it be. After all, many authors can—and do—publish books without agents, yet no agent can survive without clients. The good writers who patiently adopt this attitude always seem to get signed.

Finally, online bookselling might not be so bad for authors after all. True, there will be real disputes over royalty rates (retail vs. direct) but the medium itself may revolutionize the book trade in author-favorable ways. Returns, long a plague to publisher (tax) and authors (reserves against), may be done away with by Internet bookselling. Imagine if your publisher sent you your total amount due each royalty period without holding any reserves against returns. Tax deferral excepted, a truism of good business management is "take all the money you can now." Even without considering the Net as a sales medium, Web exposure does much to increase author publicity and therefore may tangentially increase unit purchases. The unfolding possibilities are remarkably inspiring.

All of this being said, I do know many of you remain concerned. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the entertainment business, books included, often undergoes cycles and we are in one now where it may be more difficult for some of you to sell. But it will pass, and it should help you to keep certain things in mind:

▼ *Persist.* Publishing books is not easy; if it were, anyone

could do it. Those authors who give up, probably should. Adopt a positive Darwinian attitude.

- ▼ *Don't try too hard to publish into the market.* This has never worked, and there's no reason to believe it will now. Keep writing and submitting what you do best.
- ▼ *If you switch type, make sure you've read a lot of your new genre or line.* This is the link between reading and authorship which got you started in the first place.
- ▼ *Believe in what you write more than what you hear.* If rumor, gossip, or statistics keep you away from the market, you need a gut check—and fast.

One of the thrills of being an agent is in seeing authors take joy in their craft. I know as well as anyone that joy does not pay the bills, but I'd rather take my 10% from someone who believes she can triumph, and my statistics show from those who do, I ultimately will. **NINK**

Evan Fogelman is a well-known literary agent. With offices in Dallas and New York, he has been in business for ten years. For more information, check out www.fogelman.com.

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ness, somehow I made it through [music swells]; I speak to you now not as one who pretends to be an expert on traditional weapons and combat, but as one who can convince readers that my *characters* are experts—so let the church say amen!

First of all, I've amassed a good collection of reference works which have served me well. Though specific to my own research needs, I think many of these would be useful to writers of historical fiction as well as writers of fantasy (and, in a few cases, even to contemporary writers). This list represents the books I use regularly, keep Post-It Notes in, and have stained with coffee rings:

***LAI: THE ART OF DRAWING THE SWORD* by Darrell Craig (Charles Tuttle Co. Inc., 1988). ISBN 0-8048-7023.**

Thank goodness for Japanese sword fighting arts; without them, I'd have had a much harder time finding instructional books for real sword combat. Although this one doesn't have pretty pictures like some of my other books (and I like pretty pictures), it's probably my favorite.

How does a good sword fighter think? How does he train? What would he do if three guys jumped him from behind in the dark? When using a sword as a daily tool, why do you powder and oil it? Which do you do first? How often do you do it? And what are you doing with that piece of sharkskin!

This book tells you.

***THE COMPLETE MARTIAL ARTS* by Paul Crompton (Roxby Productions Ltd., 1989). ISBN 1-85471-042-7.**

This is a full-color pictorial guide to over 25 styles of fighting, complete with traditional weapons used in various styles, from the familiar to the extremely exotic. It's been invaluable to me as inspiration for developing fantasy-world fighting styles and weapons systems.

Pop quiz: Do you know which traditional Asian fighting art uses oars and tortoise shells among their weapons?

***NUNCHAKU: KARATE WEAPON OF SELF-DEFENSE* by Fumio Demura (Ohara Publications, 41st printing in 1995!). ISBN 0-89750-006-7.**

This is a short, easy, thoroughly illustrated book about using the traditional Japanese flailing weapon (made so famous in the West by Bruce Lee). The back cover also lists an extensive array of Asian fighting arts books available from the same publisher, ranging from the obviously useful (*Knife Self-Defense for Combat*) to the esoteric (*Won Hio and Yul-Kok*).

***THE WEAPONS AND FIGHTING ARTS OF INDONESIA* by Donn F. Draeger (Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1993). ISBN 0-8048-1716-2.**

Although possibly a little exotic for a historical writer, this book is a goldmine for a fantasy writer, full of descriptions of fighting techniques and drawings of weapons I could never have imagined (including weapons which, according to Indonesian tradition, possess magical qualities).

***ARMS & ARMOUR OF THE MEDIEVAL KNIGHT: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF WEAPONRY IN THE MIDDLE AGES* by David Edge and John Miles Paddock (Crescent Books, 1993). ISBN 0-517-10319-2.**

A little slow-going if you don't find the subject fascinating (I don't), this book nonetheless offers thorough and detailed information, some excellent diagrams, and lots of good pictures.

***THE ART OF JAPANESE SWORDSMANSHIP: A MANUAL OF EISHIN-RYU IAIDO* by Nicklaus Suino (Weatherhill, Inc., 1995). ISBN: 0-8348-0300-3.**

Another Japanese fighting art instructional, this book is particularly good in terms of explaining blade choice, quality, care, and maintenance. (What do you do after someone has bled all over your sword?) Like *LAI*, it also de- ► ► ► ►

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scribes a number of fighting scenarios in step-by-step sequence.

WEAPONS: A PICTORIAL HISTORY by Edwin Tunis
(World Publishing/ Times Mirror, 1972).
ISBN 0-529-03702-5.

This out-of-print book is worth looking for. A simple historical review of Western weapons and military styles/strategies from the Stone Age through modern times, it provides good drawings and clear explanations.

What happened in a siege (apart from a lengthy interruption in pizza delivery)? How did archers function in battle? What was so great about Roman soldiers? Read on, MacDuff!

THE ART OF WAR by Sun Tzu.

(Okay, I don't know if his last name was Tzu or Sun, so cut me some slack.)

This classic work of military strategy (quoted constantly in James Clavell's *Noble House*) was written more than two thousand years ago by "a mysterious Chinese warrior-philosopher."

No, it doesn't tell you how to wield a sword, break someone's ribs, or clean a blade; it teaches intelligent strategy and tactics. I find it indispensable for making my characters seem like they know what they're doing in combat, battle, and politics. Sun Tzu helped me figure out time and time again how my impoverished and out-numbered good guys could get the upper hand against their enemies.

This is in public domain and available in many editions. I used to have an edition which contained lots of commentary; I found I was unable to wade through it. I now have the tiny Shambhala Pocket Classics edition (ISBN 0-87773-537-9) which contains a bare minimum of commentary, just enough to clarify Sun Tzu's maxims for me.

A COLLECTOR'S GUIDE TO SWORDS, DAGGERS, & CUTLASSES by Gerard Weland (Chartwell Books, Inc., 1991). ISBN 1-55521-726-5.

A couple of excellent diagrams in this book clearly label/explain the parts of a sword (did you know there are over a dozen?). A simple but thorough color pictorial guide of swords through the ages, this book explains their uses, their strengths, and their weaknesses. This is another book I have found very useful and well worth getting.

SWORDS AND HILT WEAPONS by many contributors
(Barnes & Noble Books, 1993).
ISBN 1-56619-249-8.

I haven't even opened this one yet, having only recently

acquired it. It was recommended to me by several writers, but has taken a while to find. A B&N instant-remainder when it's available, it's a big coffee table book with many pictures, diagrams, and lots of text.

I research both armed and unarmed combat because, gosh, sometimes characters don't have their weapons with them. One of the interesting—and challenging—things about traditional weapons and combat is that there are hundreds (probably thousands) of different styles. Now there are hundreds (perhaps thousands) of kinds of guns and rifles, but there aren't whole art forms and subcultures devoted to different ways of pulling the trigger.

Traditional weapons and combat, however, differ tremendously according not only to what period you're studying, but also what society—and even which *part* of what society you're studying. In Indonesia alone, for example, there are literally hundreds of styles of the national fighting art, *penjak silat*. These styles aren't subtle variations, either; they range from animal styles such as Tiger Style and Monkey Style (remarkably different from each other) to styles which appear almost dance-like (indeed, they were practiced as dances to fool the colonial masters who had forbidden traditional fight training). Moreover, each style comes with different weapons, and some styles emphasize weapon-use more than others.

Experience being the greatest teacher, I have found enrollment in fighting arts classes extremely useful. NINC members who attended the 1996 conference in Baltimore may remember seeing my teacher, Jerry Spradlin, bruise and abuse me for 90 minutes in a seminar for the edification of my colleagues (the things I do for NINC...).

I think the ideal fighting teachers for a writer are those who focus their teaching on real-life situations, real combat, real wounding, and real killing. (How many people, after all, want to read an epic fantasy novel about characters who fight evil by scoring points, winning trophies, or changing their belt color?) Finding the right teacher or right group is a question of hit or miss, of course. My advice: A group in which cops are students (or if a cop is the teacher) is likely to focus more on reality than on the tidy rules of a competition ring; ask for recommendations from likely sources (that scruffy guy working out with fighting sticks in your local park, for example); and keep an eye out for fighting arts which aren't yet widely commercialized in the U.S.—things like *bondo*, *kali*, or *penjak*, for example.

As an on-and-off fighting student, I've learned many things which I've used in my books; I've also used my classmates on numerous occasions to figure out how to make a scene work: "One guy is armed with a *nunchaku*," I might say to my teacher and classmates, "which he uses with real skill. He knows his opponent is nearby, but it's dark and he

can't see him. The opponent has a dagger and needs, by the end of the scene, to disarm him without hurting him too much and to immobilize him long enough for them to exchange some dialogue." My teacher, my classmates, and I have experimented with my various scenarios, trying moves and counter-moves until coming up with a progression that works well. Relatively new to action writing, I have felt much more confident about writing scenes which I've developed using real bodies.

However, you need not make the commitment to a regular weekly (or thrice-weekly) fighting class to enjoy the benefits of some direct experience in weapons and combat. Look around—many places offer short introductory courses which at least expose you firsthand to new ideas, experiences, and techniques. I, for example, once took a four-session introductory course in fighting with a staff (like Gabrielle, the sidekick in *Xena*). A survivalist school in the next county offers one-day hands-on seminars in knife fighting (as well as courses in guns and rifles). I developed a very serious respect for bladed weapons when I saw an FBI training video wherein officers armed with guns (in both real-life and re-enacted scenarios) were defeated by opponents using only a knife.

While really firing a gun helped my ability to write about it, I already knew (thanks to my uncles) what it was like to kick and hit someone, to fall to the ground locked in mortal combat (because it was *my* ice cream, dammit). Not everyone does, though. Want to find out, so you can describe it with veracity? Model Mugging, based in Oakland, California, originated a 24-hour introductory course (spaced out over a week or two) that lets you find out what it's like, for the purposes of non-lethal self-defense (i.e. you train to a knock-out blow); this class, or a variation of it, is now offered in a number of other cities. By the way, note of interest: it was in Model Mugging that I learned just how many people teach "self defense courses" who haven't the slightest idea what they're talking about; two—*two!*—of my fellow classmates were self-defense teachers who admitted to this.

Attending training seminars, which only last a day or two, is another useful experience. Again, martial arts tend to be most pertinent to this article, since these arts focus on traditional weapons as well as unarmed combat. Famous teachers like Danny Inosanto demonstrate so much in a seminar that you couldn't take notes fast enough to record it all. I once watched Herman Suwanda, a great Indonesian *penjak silat* teacher, demonstrate a few dozen ways to kill someone just using a *sarong*—a simple piece of clothing! If you don't want to participate, I imagine most seminars would welcome a paying attendee who just wanted to watch and take notes. Ask some local martial arts groups to put you on a mailing list for upcoming seminars.

For more Western-oriented traditional weapons and fighting, one can always investigate the Society of Creative Anachronism, the local Renaissance Fair, and the arms and armour specialist at the nearest big-city museum. Other more specifically-focused societies, such as the Arabian Knights Equestrian Combattants in my community, often emerge from the roots of the SCA. As with martial arts, in-

vestigating the subculture through personal attendance, magazines, newsletters, the Net, and seminars will usually eventually lead you to the information or opportunity you seek.

Having prepared myself so well for writing fantasy... I then realized that I didn't know enough about horses to write about them as daily "equipment," either. Sure, I had a horse growing up (whom my mother scathingly referred to as Rex The Wonder Horse), but all he did was eat lots and terrorize our dogs. He was too chubby for battle, and far too lazy to haul busy fictional characters over rough ground for days on end. He had not prepared me well to write heroic fantasy. Consequently, I came up with a Really Good Excuse for the absence of horses in my first two fantasy novels. However, bright writer that I am, I've somehow wound up planning a new book wherein the characters eat, sleep, live, and sometimes even procreate on horseback. And I'm starting from scratch.

Any suggestions? **NINK**

After writing 13 romance novels under a pseudonym, Campbell Award-winner Laura Resnick's first fantasy novel, In Legend Born, will be released in hardcover by Tor Books in August 1998. She is currently finishing the sequel, and it's just a vicious rumor that running the 1997 NINC conference put her 8 years behind schedule.

Plagiarism Settlement Reached

New York Times bestselling author Nora Roberts announced April 15 that a settlement agreement has been executed in the copyright infringement suit filed by Roberts against Janet Dailey in August, 1997. The suit involved four of Ms. Dailey's novels—*Notorious*, *Aspen Gold*, *Scrooge Wore Spurs*, and *Tangled Vines*—and over ten novels by Nora Roberts.

Ms. Roberts will receive financial compensation for the instances of copying identified in the suit. The financial terms and conditions of the agreement are confidential. Ms. Roberts has announced that she will donate all compensation resulting from this settlement to Literacy Volunteers of America, The Authors Guild Foundation, and The Authors League Fund.

As part of the settlement, and in order to put behind them the events that led to the filing of the lawsuit, Ms. Roberts and Ms. Dailey have agreed to have independent parties review other books written by Janet Dailey to determine whether there are additional instances of copying.

Ms. Roberts has written over 120 novels and has over 50 million copies of her books in print, including her current *New York Times* bestsellers, *Homeport* and *Sanctuary*.

Tahoe '98

Our Local Connection: A Conference Update

This month's Conference Update brings us a communique from NINC member Elane Osborn:

"As a long-time resident of Reno and a frequent visitor to Lake Tahoe, I'm here to tell you what a great choice the Site Committee made for the 1998 NINC Annual Conference. Tahoe is the perfect place to cool down and recharge your creative batteries.

"Reno, my home town, will be your first stop on the way to the lake of the sky. You'll land in a recently updated, medium-sized airport that is very visitor friendly.

"Baggage claim is simple to find and service is reasonably quick. Step outside and see the mountains rise above the valley, beckoning for you to wind your way—through trees dressed in October gold—to the Hyatt's front door. It's a journey you can make by limousine, shuttle, or rental car. (The Conference Brochure in July will provide you with specific information about all three methods.)

"Reno-Sparks, Carson City, Virginia City, Truckee, and Lake Tahoe, itself, all offer tons of opportunities to learn more about life in the Old West, the history of mining, the growth of gambling, behind-the-scenes scoops on showroom life and legends, and close-up encounters with the area's abundant and varied wildlife.

"If you arrive a few days early, a rental car will enable you to stop in at Carson City and Virginia City on your drive from Reno to Tahoe. Or, if you take a different route, you can visit the Donner Party Museum and the great little mountain town of Truckee.

"In future newsletters, I'll tell you more about these areas and their research and entertainment opportunities. But if all that sounds a tad too ambitious, just think about spending a few stress-

free days talking with friends and business associates while soaking up the serenity of the Jewel of the Sierra, and make your reservation for NINC '98."

Thanks, Elane! If any of you have specific questions for Elane about the Tahoe/Reno area, e-mail them to me and I'll pass them along to her. And by next month's Update, I hope to have exciting news to share about several of the speakers and special sessions that Kathy Chwedyk, this year's Program Chairman, has been working to secure for our edification and delight.

— **Judy Myers**
1998 Conference Coordinator



NINC 1998 CONFERENCE FACTS

DATES: Thursday, October 15 through
Sunday, October 18

PLACE: Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, North
Shore, Incline Village, Nevada
Phone: (702) 832-1234

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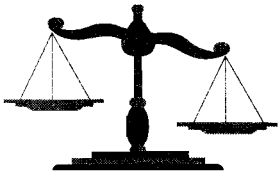
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Advocacy Column: *Gorilla Tactics*

You have a contract. It is a congenial, legal agreement between you and your publisher.

So, what if you exercise those rights in accordance with the contract and your publisher would rather you didn't? What if the publisher ignores your request? Or refuses to discuss the issue?

Contractually, you have recourse . . . but do you really want to use legal methods? And if you do, are you prepared to pay the price?

This month, I interviewed two authors, Robin Lee Hatcher and Ann Maxwell AKA Elizabeth Lowell. Each author has found herself in a difficult position with respective publishers for no other reason than she decided to exercise her legal rights under the terms of her publishing contract(s).

I deeply appreciate their candor in answering my questions. All of us can learn from their insight . . . but a couple of questions in particular were of strong interest to me. I asked them if they felt they had been supported during this difficult time in their careers by the writing community and if not, what we as an organization could do better the next time a writer finds himself in the hot seat.

Change doesn't happen easily. As Tania Zamorsky, Esq. stated in her article in the Winter 1998 Authors Guild Bulletin ("Avoiding the Worst When Your Publisher Cuts Costs"), the author is in a weaker bargaining position during any contract negotiations with a publisher—" . . . but an informed author can significantly narrow this gap."

Because Hatcher and Maxwell were willing to stand up for their contractual rights, hundreds of authors are now being treated more fairly. Both writers are to be admired.

— Cathy Maxwell

Robin Lee Hatcher:

For me, it all began with an audit. I did not audit because I suspected my publisher of cheating or stealing. I did it because it simply made good business sense. Like balancing my checkbook each month when I get my bank statement and making sure there hasn't been a computer or clerical error that is costing me money.

During my contract negotiations with this publisher, I was being asked to make a decision on an offer without any of those numbers important to my career (print run, copies shipped, total returns, etc.), numbers which the publisher had but which I was being denied. I knew an audit was the

only way I could obtain them. I initiated the audit process in May 1994.

In January 1995, after the results of the audit were in (results which showed a significant sum of unpaid royalties), Paul Rosenzweig and Gail Gross of Royalty Review Services met with the publisher and presented their findings. The publisher rejected the results of the audit, offering to settle for what amounted to approximately 10% of the unpaid royalties discovered. I did not accept their offer. More correspondence was sent over the next few months to the publisher from both me and the auditor, seeking a more reasonable resolution. Such a resolution wasn't reached.

At first, I used my local attorney, hoping that a simple letter from him, stating that I was considering litigation, might do the trick. It didn't. In January 1996, my attorney advised it would be in my best interests to retain a New York attorney with experience in publishing law.

At that point, I contacted the Authors Guild. While they do not "recommend" attorneys, they do have a list of attorneys who have worked in publishing related matters. I placed calls to the attorneys whose names I'd taken from the AG. The decision to hire Jerome Noll of the law firm of Lax & Noll was made following an in-person meeting. The decision to sue on behalf of a class instead of as an individual was made later, after I understood all my options, all the ramifications of doing so, and how other authors could benefit from it, long term.

No, I did not feel support from the writing community at large. I always believed the professional writers' organizations to which I belong should have kept the matter in front of their membership on a consistent basis, if by nothing more than to mention in their magazines or newsletters that the litigation was still in progress. I'm not saying they should have taken sides or done editorials or whatever. But there were a surprising number of authors who never knew, never heard, that a lawsuit had been filed or what it was about, and that's because the organizations who should have been the source of dispensing such information didn't put it "out there" to be seen after the initial press release.

I think this lack of support is linked directly to fear. Most writers are afraid because we feel so out of control when it comes to our futures and the power of the publisher. And since I understand and have felt that very same fear, I can also understand why the support wasn't there. But I do hope things will change in the future. I hope that the next author who steps up to bat on behalf of herself and/or of the writing community (this class action suit affected over 270 authors) will find a much different scenario awaiting her.

If our professional organizations can't pro-





Advocacy Column: *Gorilla Tactics*

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vide the strong, united front to give us the strength and courage we need when publishers don't honor their contracts or when they "step on the little guy," then our professional organizations are failing to live up to their purpose and reason for being.

I have not felt any industry backlash that I'm aware of. I am still selling books to publishers and I am still being asked to speak at workshops and conferences.

Communications from other authors asking, "How is it going?" or saying, "You go girl!" meant a great deal to me. (God bless those who did. You know who you are. Thank you.) Some negative gossip reached me, but mostly there was a deafening silence.

However, I believed in my heart that I was doing what was right; I hadn't rushed into the lawsuit but had only done so after prayerful consideration and many attempts to resolve the issue without going to court. That knowledge was what sustained me. That and the good wishes and prayers of my family and close friends who knew how difficult the whole, long, drawn-out process was for me.

It was worth the risk, the stress, the sleepless nights, the expense, etc. It was worth going through the grueling days of deposition; the days upon days upon days I spent reading and photocopying 14 years worth of contracts, correspondence, royalty statements, etc.; and the many hours on the telephone. It's worth it because now authors who have books published by this publisher will not be in the dark as so many of us were in the past.

If I had it to do over, I would (a) audit all 14 of my titles from that publisher instead of only eight of them, and (b) I wouldn't have taken a full year to find and retain a New York attorney specializing in publishing law (that's how long it was between the publisher's offer to settle for approximately 10% and the date I retained Lax & Noll). Otherwise, I can't think of anything else I would change.

Ann Maxwell:

I never went to litigation, never threatened to sue. The issue involved was ownership of copyright in general; specifically, reversion of rights to books that were out of print.

Every publishing contract has a clause concerning when and under what conditions rights to a published work revert to the author. I read my contract(s), followed the steps outlined for reclaiming out of print books . . . and the chips hit the fan. As I was merely following the publisher's own legal protocol, I was surprised. Yeah, I was naive. Yeah, it was a long time ago.

First came the friendly phone calls telling me I didn't want to do what I was doing. Naively I thanked them for their concern and said I did indeed want to reclaim those

books and I didn't think it would hurt my career at all. Then came the not-so-friendly phone calls. At that point my agent said, "Get a lawyer." The only lawyer I knew was a fan of mysteries (which Evan and I wrote at the time). The back-and-forthing went on for months. With each communication the publisher got less civil. Finally I received a letter stating that because I insisted on getting back my out-of-print books, the publisher would no longer accept any more of my work in the future. And, by the way, my permission to use the name Elizabeth Lowell was revoked.

All because I asked the publisher to follow the terms of their own contract.

Fortunately, I had connected with another publisher in the interim. Avon supported me fully. Their legal department made it clear that they would back me to the last legal ditch. Thank you, Avon. The other publisher went silent. After a year or so, the name dispute was resolved by renewed civility on the first publisher's part.

As for support from the writing community . . . When you get in deep kim chee with a big publisher, you very quickly find out who your friends are. In my case, they could be counted on one hand. They were my friends going in and they are my friends now. They know who they are. And they know who they aren't. (Yes, there were plenty of authors who didn't want me "rocking the boat." I'm sorry they were so frightened. Later, after it was all settled and old news, a few writers came up and privately thanked me, saying that my pursuit of the reversion issue had made it possible for them to get back their own titles.)

With the exception of the Authors Guild, I received zero to negative support from the writing community. I'd like to say it was different, but I know how to separate fiction from reality. That's how I make a living.

Would I have done anything different? Yeah. I would have understood going in that any contract signed between me and an 800 pound gorilla is a contract of adhesion. Some day, someone reading this column will get to test in court when a contract *isn't* a contract.

Good luck. And I hope you are a member of the Authors Guild.

The Authors Guild now has a Website that includes news, practical information (a neat section is Model Contract Advice), and a legal archive. They have also posted membership information. You'll find them at <http://www.authorsguild.org>

If you have a question you would like to see addressed in the Advocacy Column, please contact Cathy Maxwell, 804-744-3376 or cmawell@bellatlantic.net.



Over the past month, it seems a lot of folks have discovered way cool new places to visit on the Web. I'm now in the habit of jotting down every site anyone recommends, so I can check it out and report on it here—and this month I have a bunch! I'll start with a few neat research sites.

Anyone into genealogy needs to take a look at www.booksatoz.com/genealogyatoz/ and try some of the links there. You'll find tips for beginners as well as sites for seasoned genealogists. I only did a bit of exploring there, but several people have reported finding ancestors and other historical folks through this site.

For broader research needs, there's a particularly fast and comprehensive search engine at <http://infind.inference.com/infind/infind.exe> that can practically read your mind to find what you're looking for on the Web. To tap into the experts on almost any topic you need to know about, check out www.liszt.com for a search of mailing lists active on the Internet. And for out of print and hard to find books (including your own backlist <g>) try www.interloc.com. This site searches online used bookstores much the way www.acses.com searches new ones.

Promotion-minded authors might want to subscribe to the "Spotlight" promotional newsletter. Go to www.eclectics.com to read back issues with articles by dozens of authors on an array of promotion opportunities and tips. One place to promote yourself online is the Free Gallery at <http://fregalry.interspeed.net>, where Web surfers can listen to you reading from your own work aloud. New NINC member Lorraine Heath was one of the featured authors there when I checked out the site.

If your readers find it hard to e-mail you because you keep changing servers (and therefore your e-mail address), you might want to check out www.pobox.com or www.poboxes.com. Both are e-mail forwarding services, with different levels of service at different prices, ranging from free to \$35 a year or so. They allow you to keep the same e-mail address even if you change ISPs every few months, and higher levels of service allow for Web page forwarding, as well.

I mentioned in January that you can subscribe to *Publishers Weekly Daily* via the Bookwire site. I've done some further exploring there, and have discovered that www.bookwire.com is a real treasure trove

for writers! All sorts of well-known organizations have their Websites there along with *PW*, to include the *Library Journal*, the *Boston Book Review*, the Book Industry Study Group, Mystery Writers of America, National Book Critics Circle, and the Association of Authors Representatives. The AAR page is particularly useful, with an up-to-date list of AAR members, along with their membership requirements and code of ethics. (This is the same info we have to send \$7 and a SASE to receive via snail-mail.) I, for one, will be referring my agent-hunting friends (and students) to that site on a regular basis.

Most of these sites were recommended by NinLink subscribers, though I pulled a few off of PANLink and the Prock-Research listservs. It makes my life even easier when people make a point of e-mailing me about sites they've found particularly helpful, too (hint, hint). The discussions and info on NinLink are wonderful, but they're too easily deleted or lost, and they don't reach everyone—though well over a third of our membership is subscribed now, at an all-time high of 230. That's why I do my best to synopsise them here.

Over the past month, we've talked about "manufactured" bestsellers, superstitions (a fun topic!), the effect of superstores on independent booksellers, the proper use of ellipses, the Random House/BDD merger, and the best historical costume books (which may become its own article).

Another book discussed and widely recommended was *STORY* by Robert McKee, from which even our most seasoned veterans claimed to have learned ways to improve their writing. If you're one of those still not Linked, and want to be, all you have to do is send an e-mail:

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—Brenda Hiatt Barber :)





EAST OF THE HUDSON

THE SHRINKING UNIVERSE

The Big Bang? No, more like the big Sucking Noise.

Following one of the quietest negotiations in business history, Bertelsmann A.G., Europe's largest media group and owner of Bantam Doubleday Dell, swallowed up the largest U.S. publisher, Random House, Inc.

The crazy thing? Nobody even knew Random House was in play.

Most of the publishing world's interest has been focused on possible deals involving Simon & Shuster, the orphaned Viacom publishing arm. Bertelsmann had reportedly been interested in some kind of deal for S&S but nobody could figure out what form the deal might take.

Then, *whacko*, one Monday morning the German High Command, headquartered in a little town named Gutersloh, announced that it had just concluded arrangements to buy Random House, Inc. from Advance Publications, lock, stock, barrel, and printing presses.

Because both companies are privately held—Bertelsmann by the descendants of a printer who made his first buck publishing hymnals and had his first hit with potboilers by the Brothers Grimm, and Advance by the Newhouse family, which owns magazines, newspapers, and a great many other things it apparently values more than book publishers—the terms of the deal are vague. The *New York Times* suggested the scope of the deal, though, by pointing out that Random did about \$1.2 billion in sales last year and that publishing companies typically are sold for 1.2 times sales.

In an odd way, that makes the deal sound small. One of the country's biggest book publishers turns out to be worth less than your typical chain of supermarkets? As Daffy Duck would say, That's dithguthing.

There will be lots of shaking and shifting as a result of the deal. Principal power in the new company will be vested in Europe, but will be wielded by Peter Olson, a 44-year-old Harvard Law School grad. Olson will be the guy to watch, according to several sources. Ultimately, his job is to control eight different publishing arms and make sure they don't get in one another's way.

That's what this play is really all about. It's part of what is called a "rationalization" of the industry. Rationalization means that instead of a bunch of little voices, all talking at once and bickering among themselves, we now have one big voice, one great and thoughtful despot whose function it is to make sure that the eight children don't become too fractious.

In other words, that competition for "product" doesn't become too costly.

The new company is an amalgamation of some of the best known names in publishing, Listen to the litany, Bantam, Doubleday, Dell-Delacorte, Broadway, Random House, Crown, Knopf, and Ballantine. That's a lot of voices now trying to talk through one megaphone.

Sure, the press releases that issued forth announcing the deal spoke of the great German respect for diversity: "It is a heritage of Bertelsmann that we respect editorial independence of publishers," Olson told the *NYT*. "The various imprints and divisions are not going to be affected by this. If anything, our hope is to enhance their effectiveness and independence in the marketplace."

Yeah, right, What else would you expect the guy to say, with the entire deal still to be reviewed by the federal officials in charge of antitrust matters?

Olson may even believe diversity can exist under a single corporate umbrella, but I can say without fear of contradiction that structured diversity is one thing, and knock-down, bare-knuckle brawling competition is another. In the future, Bantam may fence politely, even sharply, with Random House over a literary property both consider commercial, but there will be no more yeasty, no holds-barred fights like in the good old days.

In short, no more auctions.

Auctions just squander resources and unrealistically raise acquisition costs. If both houses want the next Stephen King, for instance, and neither will back down, Olson will quietly step in and rationalize the matter. He will consider the best interests of all involved, in this case including the author (yeah, right!), and will award the prize to one or the other of his princelings. The awarding will be discreet, perhaps a subtly arched eyebrow or the faint gesture with the tip of an index finger, but it will happen. And when it does, the bidding will be over.

In an earlier column, I noted that publishers were all talking over the last year about how the industry needed to bring author advances into line. I think that's what just happened.

One of the dozens of stories spawned by the news quoted a New York agent who said that the big losers in the deal would be writers, but not the ones at the very top. The marquee stars, the franchise players, will still draw big bucks, but the writers regarded as less-than-sure things will be in trouble. This agent said that the amalgamation would most hurt those writers who have been getting \$250,000 a book. Now they will be getting \$150,000 a book. (Only one problem: I don't know any writers who are getting \$250,000.)

I am not an economist, but I do know enough about the



market mechanism to think some of this amalgamation is inevitable, whether we like it or not. What surprises me more is the fact that half of America's publishing operations (I don't want to call them houses anymore since that implies that they stand alone) are now under the control of international corporations headed by Europeans.

That last statement may sound jingoistic; I don't mean it to be. I am merely puzzled. I guess that cultural institutions like book publishers are of such limited value that smart American businessmen unload them whenever they can. Maybe that means the book business isn't as important in the big scheme of things as I thought.

Or maybe the Europeans are smarter than Americans realize.

I wrote several months ago about signs that Bertelsmann has shown inventiveness in dealing with niche markets through book clubs. In that vein, I would like to think that Olson and his colleagues will do a strong, creative job of publishing and marketing books here and overseas. It is worth noting that Bertelsmann seems to like books more than do the other five major media companies operating in the world today.

Bertelsmann, for instance, counts on book sales for 38 percent of its revenues. Time Warner's revenues include only 5.4 percent from books, and Walt Disney only seventenths of one percent.

So I'll suspend final judgment about the deal. At least the guys from Guttersloh seem to know how to read.

REVIEWS COUNT

Who says book reviewers are all slime. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt of the *New York Times* can be a good scout. Last month, his review of Larry Gelbart's *Laughing Matters* sold at least one copy—to me.

Gelbart wrote the screenplays for *M*A*S*H*, *Tootsie*, and many other fine films. He has made me laugh a great many times, but without the Lehmann-Haupt review, I wouldn't have bought his bio because I wouldn't have realized Gelbart was such a thoughtful writer when it came to his craft.

For instance, on plotting, Gelbart says, "No matter how many times you plot a script successfully, the next one, representing new and uncharted territory, convinces you that you were merely lucky the last time out, that you really don't know how to do it at all."

He also quotes Thomas Mann: "A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people."

At 70, Gelbart still has perspective. And he can still whack a one-liner right up the middle of the diamond like

Rod Carew: "Contrary to popular belief, it is not the legs that go first; it's remembering the word for legs."

That is what some of the folks I know call "a senior moment." Others refer to them as "brain farts." Gelbart has another name for them but it escapes me right now.

ONCE MORE TO THE BREACH

Twenty-six of the country's biggest independent bookstores are on the legal warpath again. This time they aren't suing the publishers. This time they are going directly after the twin devils, Borders Group and Barnes & Noble.

The suit, led by the American Booksellers Association, alleges that the two superstore chains have forced publishers to make secret and illegal deals which put independent booksellers at a disadvantage. Those deals include promotional and discount programs like front-of-the-store and end-cap placement.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that one of the ploys used, illegally, by the chains was a threat to return large quantities of unsold books for refund credit unless the publishers agreed to additional discounts. That sounds like remaindering in place to me. I don't know if it's illegal, but I know nobody has made much money at it, not even the chains.

The suit was filed in the Northern District of California, which includes San Francisco. That region has some of the most fractious and activist booksellers in the country, and while I've made fun of them once in a while over the years, I have to admit their energy and inventiveness amazes me.

A previous action by the ABA and these same booksellers ended in a consent decree signed by six major publishers. Nobody was ever able to convince me that the consent decree was a victory for the indies, but the change in targets by the booksellers does mean one thing. At least they won't have to worry about a boycott of their trade show, as happened when they sued the publishers. The superstores never were invited to Chicago anyway.

EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE, MY BIPPY

In the future, when I hear corporate executives maunder on about how they leave creative decisions in the hands of editors, I will always think of the case of Rupert Murdoch and Chris Patten.

Murdoch is the power in charge at the News Corporation, which owns HarperCollins, the international book publisher. Patten was, until last summer the British governor of Hong Kong. He presided over the crown colony's last years and the handover of the city to the People's Republic of China. Patten and Murdock were not





EAST OF THE HUDSON

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 17*

friends to begin with, and after this last contretemps, they are first-class foes. Here's how it happened:

Patten, outspoken and articulate, has never made a secret of his dislike of the rulers of China. Murdoch, also smart, if not so articulate, has recently curried favor with those same Chinese potentates, mainly because he sees that country as a vast new market for almost everything his News Corp. produces or creates, including but not limited to satellite television programming.

So it was a little surprising to find that HarperCollins in London had signed Patten up for a book on his experiences with China and his thoughts about the country's leaders.

Surprising? Did I say surprising? Make that flabbergasting.

Didn't those dunderheads in London know? Or did they really think the boss actually *meant* what he said about wanting bright, independent editors who would fight for what they believe in?

I admit it, friends. I was once that young and foolish. I listened to what the corporate boss said, not what he meant. That's why I'm now an independent entrepreneur.

What was really amazing wasn't that the foo hit the fan when Rupert found out about the book. What was amazing was the way the flap played out in public and how it was finally resolved.

Apparently there was a lot of in-house back-and-forth beginning last July, when Rupert first found out about the Project. Earlier this year the in-house discussion went public when HarperCollins execs suggested in the press that Patten's book was boring and unpublishable.

That moved the editor who had acquired the project to resign. Seems he was of the opinion the Patten book was one of the best by a politician he had ever handled.

Things got even nastier when Murdoch turned on some of his own executives, even criticizing them by name in the public press for misreading his mind about the book and about how he wanted it handled. He said he had always disliked the idea, but that he had never authorized the whispering campaign against the book.

Finally, after much shouting and pointing of fingers and after the threat of lawsuits by both Patten and the editor, Murdoch settled the matter. Patten got the book back, and got to keep the advance he had already collected from HarperCollins. Not only that, Patten immediately turned around and contracted with a new British publisher for the same advance. In other words, he double-dipped. Then he peddled the American rights for a goodly sum, thanks to all the publicity.

The editor, who probably didn't like working for a liv-

ing anyway, got a separate, lucrative settlement which will allow him, no doubt, to buy a villa in Tuscany and write that novel he's always dreamed about.

And Murdoch? He lost a couple hundred thou on the deal and he got one more little blot of yolk on his chin. Not that he really cares. No international business billionaire worries about shelling out a few bucks to a couple of those annoying little people. As for the embarrassment . . . Huh? Rupert Murdoch and "embarrassed" in the same sentence is a prime example of oxymoron.

SIDEBAR SYNDROME

Another one of the several reasons I'm no longer in journalism is my undying affection for what's called the "sidebar."

Yeah, well, I like to stand at the *side bar*, too, but what I'm talking about is the story that plays off the main news, the little human angle nestled beneath the shoulder of the mainbar, with an italic headline on it and no other reason for existence except to personalize the big event, make it softer and, maybe, subtler.

The sidebars to the Bertelsmann/Random story were myriad. Frank Krentz, sometimes known as Mr. Amanda Quick, sent me one from the *Sydney Morning Herald* in which Australian writers of optimistic bent suggested the deal was an example of triumphant internationalism which could mean they now stand a better chance of cracking the U.S./U.K. market. To them, that's like winning the lottery.

Somehow that bit of blithe felicity helped put a different perspective on the deal. It was a reminder that we all tend to generalize from our particular situations to the big picture. We all think the sky is falling, just because a piece of birdshit hits us on top of the head.

And sometimes those generalizations are misleading. The sky may be falling, or maybe it's just a bad hair day. Sidebars help us to decide which.

Several other sidebars and tangential facts caught my eye as I gathered Bertelsmann material off the Internet. One was a longish piece in the *NY Times* about Random House's history. The venerable old house was started by Bennett Cerf (now there's a name from out of the past) and Donald Klopfer in 1923, The house's first hit? An edition of Voltaire's *Candide* with art by Rockwell Kent.

Now I don't know about you, but I certainly don't associate Kent's illustrations with the French classics, but who knows what's going to work? Didn't then, don't now.

Cerf, whom I remember more as a punster and guest on "What's My Line" than as a giant of letters, published James Joyce. Unexpurgated. He discovered William Saroyan. He played nursemaid to William Faulkner, the notable drunk. He spotted a Truman Capote short story in a magazine and



commissioned a book, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.

Those facts are impressive. They help convert a plain, old business corporation into a cultural icon, an institution.

So does a little background on Alfred Knopf, namesake and founder of another of the houses which is now folded into Bertelsmann A.G. Knopf was a crusty old bastard, "I think that best sellers should be abolished by law," he once said, "They're just another example of running with the crowd."

Well, Knopf is running with the crowd now, after a fashion. It publishes Anne Rice and Michael Crichton. It has paid its bills for several years on John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, a bestseller if ever there was one.

So, friends, when we bemoan the event of this month and worry about the future, both our own and our culture's, we should keep sidebar perspective on things. Random House is a cultural icon but Bennett Cerf has been dead for 26 years. Sam Newhouse bought the entire operation in 1980 from RCA. Newhouse, who is 70, ran the house creditably until this year. Then he decided to sell, mainly because he and his brother are trying to anticipate estate taxes on the rest of their holdings.

I'm trying to suggest that the Random House sale and the Bertelsmann amalgamation aren't the end of the world. They are just part of the ebb and flood of business history. We shouldn't regard them as more than they are.

On the other hand, there are quite a few seagulls around today, aren't there?

POSTSCRIPT

Is it small of me to note that the tectonic shift in Manhattan publishing managed to scatter sand on several big, sweet lollipops. One of the losers, according to my best sources in New York, was Alberto Vitale.

Mr. Vitale downsized a whole lot of writers into the trash can during his years as an executive, first at Bantam Doubleday Dell, and then at Random House, Inc. He preached the doctrine of fewer titles, more hits. Then he practiced that doctrine by cutting lists in half, and then in half again.

His record was spotty, to say the least. BDD was a success under his control, and Random House may well be the most powerful house in New York. But the firm's profits have been flat in the past couple of years, which is why the Newhouse clan decided to sell.

And now Alberto Vitale, who once stood like the Colossus of Rhodes, is chairman of the new

publishing company's supervisory board.

My sources say that's one of those all-purpose titles designed to make a guy feel good when he's put out to pasture. It does mean Vitale has direct control over just about nothing.

I've taken my cheap shots at Vitale, whom I have never met and would probably like if I did. He was in charge of at least two downsizings that, taken together, killed a series my wife and I liked very much, so I suppose my animus is irresponsibly personal.

Vitale didn't know A.E. Maxwell from Adam's pet poodle. He was just making decisions that he thought had to be made.

Executives are like generals; most of them never look a private soldier in the eye. That's probably just as well. If the generals had to shake hands with each soldier as he went off to the battle, there would probably be fewer battles,

Now, however, Alberto seems to be the one on the downside of the downsize, and I doubt it feels any better to him than it did to Fiddler and Fiora.

Just to show there's no hard feelings, I will sit down with Alberto and have a drink next time I'm in New York.

But he'll have to buy. His parachute was platinum all the way. Mine was what the seagull left behind.

— Evan Maxwell

Psssssst.

Did you read page 3? (Go ahead. Check back. We'll be here...)

Betcha thought we'd hang tough with our pleas for Letters, didn't you?

Nope.

It's "tough love" time on that one. If you ever want to see letters in these pages again, the clamour will have to come from you-know-who.

Excuse me now, I have a latte date with Pogo.

— N'imp



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: pappano@ionet.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	March 5	March 12	March 19	March 26
Catherine Anderson	<i>Forever After</i> , Avon			77n	40
Loretta Chase	<i>Last Hellion</i> , Avon			207	125
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Maze</i> , Jove		22n	6	24
Jude Deveraux	<i>An Angel for Emily</i> , Pocket	104			
Christina Dodd	<i>A Well Favored Gentleman</i> , Avon	83			
Jennifer Greene	<i>A Baby in His In-Box</i> , Silhouette	136n			
Linda Howard, Linda Lael Miller, et al.	<i>Always & Forever</i> , Silhouette			114n	
Joan Johnston	<i>The Bodyguard</i> , Island			42n	25
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>A Woman's Touch</i> , Mira			70n	92
Debbie Macomber	<i>Texas Two-Step</i> , Silhouette	73n	96		
Debbie Macomber	<i>Montana</i> , Mira		121n	28	32
Anne McCaffrey	<i>Dragonseye</i> , Del Rey	123			
Linda Lael Miller	<i>The Vow</i> , Pocket			74n	55
Mary Jo Putney	<i>The Rake</i> , Topaz		51n	71	101
Amanda Quick	<i>Affair</i> , Bantam	47	90	137	132
Nora Roberts	<i>The Calhoun Women: Lilah and Suzanna</i> , Silhouette	31	61	83	81
Nora Roberts	<i>Public Secrets</i> , Bantam		46n	39	19
Nora Roberts	<i>Homeport</i> , Putnam				31n
Nora Roberts, Ruth Ryan Langan, Marianne Willman, et al.	<i>Once Upon a Castle</i> , Jove	64	139		

et al.: written with other author(s) who aren't members of Novelists, Inc.

Member	Title	Feb 5	Feb 12	Feb 19	Feb 26
Nora Roberts	<i>The Calhoun Women: Lilah and Suzanna</i> , Silhouette		225	37	27
Nora Roberts, Ruth Ryan Langan, Marianne Willman, et al.	<i>Once Upon Castle</i> , Jove			43n	41
Elizabeth Thornton	<i>You Only Love Twice</i> , Bantam			149n	

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