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

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Novelists' Ink

It'll Be Out—When?

Knowing When Your Book Will Be on the Shelves

By ANN CHAMBERLIN

Your book's slated as an "October release." Terrific!

The galleys are in, you have your covers. It's time to schedule booksignings, radio interviews, press releases, and every other bit of publicity you can cram into the six weeks or so of sales opportunity you have. Most important of all, what do you tell your mother when she asks, "When will I see it in my favorite store?"

As any author with at least two titles under her belt realizes, the obvious answer, "October 1," may be off by weeks. These weeks are prime selling time, when no day should be wasted.

My Experience

Perhaps, in the "old days," you had experiences like this one of mine.

Last summer I was, rather belatedly, arranging a signing in August for my October release.

"We have that new title in already," the manager of this large chain told me. "I can see them now—ten of them. We can schedule the date as soon as you'd like."

Well, that weekend was not an option, since I'd already planned a vacation to southern Utah. In an attempt to kill two birds with one stone, I'd planned a signing in this obscure corner of the planet for my earlier books, realizing I wasn't likely to get down there again any time soon. This small-

town independent bookseller had been friendly enough, but told me to "bring your own stock" since distribution out in the wilds was hit and miss.

Because I myself had yet to see the new October title, I made a quick jaunt down to the local chain. I'll pick up a few and carry them with me down south along with the older titles, I thought.

No way was the salesperson behind the chain's counter going to let me buy—even look at—an October release.

"But I spoke to your manager," I begged.

"He's not in right now."

"He said you had them."

"We do. But it's not October first yet. I could put one on hold for you."

"Thanks, but no thanks."

Sleight-of-Hand

In an effort to delve into the mysteries of the "release-date calendar" I interviewed publishers, distributors, booksellers, and authors.

What I've found is that 1999 may well prove to be the Year, not of the Rabbit, but of the Release Date. A

publisher's listed "release" date may finally be the same as the date you can actually find it on the shelf. Years of confusion first attracted me to this topic, but even as I researched it, houses changed their policies before my eyes.

Some publishers are promising that this year, the right hand will finally know what the left is doing. They will magically pull a white rabbit from their hats. Much of what I write may be history by the time you read this. By that time, **Continued on page 4** ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

MORE (and Less) THAN YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT...

According to an article in *L.A. Weekly* titled "Top Secret! Development Hell on the Web" by Brendan Bernhard, Hollywood development executives have begun to use secret Internet tracking sites—Web sites that are increasingly used to follow and comment on spec scripts, pitches, and books with popcorn potential as they make their merry way through Hollywood. Projects are discussed on the boards—of which there are about 17 with a total of about 500 members—and can be tanked by the comments of a single reader. By the same token, a feeding frenzy can be caused by one positive comment. Sort of makes one wonder what's next for New York, doesn't it?

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Wherein your president ruminates on the nature of conferences and comfort zones...

In the interests of getting out of the house every once in a while, I recently flew outside my comfort zone and went to a conference I'd never attended before. I had a wonderful time, even as I realized this was very unlike any of the other writers' conferences I'd attended over the years. Totally different head, as we used to say.

This one mixes fans, booksellers, wannabes, and authors, so many of the workshops were not intended for crusty old hands like me. They were more on the order of panels of writers offering insights into the Life of the Writer to the Little People out there who were presumably hungry for details on how their faves got started and where they get their ideas. I get plenty of that at home, thanks. (Except for the Little People. I don't have any of those.) Plus I am admittedly a hard sell when it comes to lectures. I fall into the "been there/done that/drew caricatures in my notebook the first time" category.

Still, I did take away one compelling insight. As the moderator summed up her panelists' conclusions on the writing life, she referred to what they'd said as "butt on, butt off, butler." By this she meant: 1) Get your butt on your chair [in terms of actually writing something]; 2) Get off your butt [in terms of submitting, promoting, etc.]; and 3) Get a butler [in terms of having any hope of a clean house or regular meals]. Butt on, butt off, butler. Works for me.

Other than that, I'm not really sure I learned anything new about the writing world at this particular conference. Well, I did decide that it's very weird to go to the same places where you see the same people year after year and then suddenly plunge into a whole new milieu. And it also started me thinking in general about conferences, about why we go and why we go back, what we hope to gain or accomplish, why we choose one over another, etc.

On the butt on/butt off fronts, I think attending conferences can be both good and bad. Go to too many, and you'll be taking time away from the writing itself, which is Not a Good Thing. Don't go to any, and you'll miss all the interaction and socialization (read: fun), as well as the realization that there is a world out there (read: fun). But it's certainly not easy to make choices, or even to get to the ones you really want to, mostly because there are so darn many of them.

By mixing in fans and booksellers, the conference I just attended creates a more promotional atmosphere. Other writers' conferences I've been to seem more geared to education for the unpublished set. Hence all the contests and handouts and tip sheets and lessons on how to write a synopsis or a query and panels of talking heads who offer advice like yes, you do need to double-space, and no, you shouldn't type on both sides of the paper, and no, you really shouldn't throw manuscripts over bathroom stalls just because you know there's an editor in there. Some among us enjoy being mentors and teachers, while others like this sort of conference for the opportunity to "give back."

**This Month
from the
President:**

*...of conferences,
comfort zones,
and compelling
insights...*

But it's not NINC. It's not like NINC's much-beloved Night-Owl sessions (now being imitated, if never duplicated, by others) where you and your peers sit around in casual groups and dish whatever you want, wherever the topics take you. It's not like NINC, where the level of knowledge about the industry is amazing, where the numbers are small enough that you can really talk to people, where there are authors from all genres instead of just one, where switching and changing and growing into new places is expected and encouraged.

All in all, there's nothing like a new experience to make you appreciate the old ones. So remember—get your butt on your chair, get off your butt and move, and get a butler. Oh, and get your butt to the NINC conference. That one's a key.

— Julie Kistler

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.

In Praise of Icon Endorsements

In his April column for NINK, Evan writes: "People don't really throw good money away purchasing dark and weighty tomes endorsed by cultural icons or intellectual aspirants."

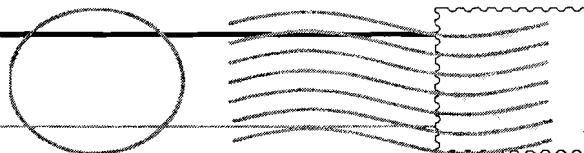
Ah-hah! I finally seem to have read something Evan didn't! Does anyone else remember an article, which came out a few years ago—I think it was in *Newsweek*, but I'm not positive—about the statistics of who actually reads the bestsellers they buy? According to this article, people not only buy books they don't read (okay, I confess, I wound up not reading *Women Who Run With Wolves* after I bought it; but I made up for that by reading *The Power of Myth* twice), some people buy books they don't even intend to read. They buy them because they're supposed to, because they want to be seen with these books in their houses, because everyone else is buying them, or because—wait for it!—cultural icons or intellectual aspirants have advised it.

According to the article, for example, only about 11% of the people who bought *A Brief History of Time* actually read it. (I didn't even understand the movie, so forget about the book.) Literary icons like Umberto Eco often appeared at the middle-to-low end of the statistical range

**Got questions?
Need information about specific projects and
activities in the works or in the planning?**

**Got ideas?
Read more about all NINC
activities online at www.ninc.com
You'll find some fun Savannah links at our
Web site, too.**

**But remember, 100% of NINC receives our
newsletter, so don't miss the opportunities to
write letters, ask questions,
pose ideas here, too!**



(so I must not be the only person who didn't get through *Foucault's Pendulum*). However, the article found that most people who buy a Danielle Steel novel or a movie star bio, for example, actually read it—and buy it for the express purpose of reading it. I don't know where the Oprah Winfrey bookclub novels fit into this spectrum, but I found it amazing that a lot of "worthy" writers are getting really rich off books that so many consumers buy without meaning to read.

As for in-store book groups, I'm all in favor of them, Evan! A local superstore is reading a book of mine this month, and local sales of that two-year old title are suddenly back up to the levels the book enjoyed in its first month of release. I can't be had, but I can sure be bought.

— Laura Resnick

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

Christine K. Benson, Rowlett TX
Judy McAnerin (*Judy Jackson*), Richmond BC, Canada
Dawn E. Reno (*Diana Lord*), Deltona FL

New Members

Joan Reeves, Houston TX
Kristen Robinette, Pinson AL
Tina Wainscott, Naples FL



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 1*

WILLIAM BLAKE IN THE 21ST CENTURY...

According to an April 24, 1999 blurb, the Associated Press reported that one of eight known copies of William Blake's *The First Book of Urizen*—a volume so rare one professor spent 35 years looking for it—sold at Sotheby's auction house for \$2.5 million. It was thought to be the highest price ever paid for a piece of English literature. The book was originally expected to sell for no more than \$700,000.

[I don't know...Somehow this seems an awfully low price for such a rare edition when celebrity autobiographies command higher advances than that... tdr ;-)]

HISTORIC VILLAGE IN CENTRAL MEXICO LAUNCHING INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

James E. Lloyd, Chairman of the Board of Ajijic Festival Internacional de Cine announced today that the committee has voted unanimously to launch the first Ajijic Film Festival on Friday, November 5, 1999.

"While the emphasis of the first festival," according to Lloyd, "will be on new and yet-to-be-discovered directors, actors, screen writers and producers, we encourage all filmmakers and production companies with a desire to showcase their work to submit feature films, short subjects, including animation, and documentaries... In addition, we will provide a forum where works in progress, including screenplays, can be presented. However, for this category, we will ▶ ▶ ▶

IT'LL BE OUT

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we will all be in a better position to see the strings attached than I am now.

As I write these words, however, I still believe in magic.

Top-Ten Release Dates

History is easier to second-guess than the future, so I'll start there.

In the "old days" the answer to "When will my book be out?" depended a lot upon your publisher and especially where you stood on the list. To some extent, this remains true. If you are one of the few with proven best-seller hopes, you will be given not just a month, but a specific "street," "laydown," or "special release" date, say October 20. (My sources used the words interchangeably, no doubt an indication of how imprecise this whole thing is.)

In the entire publishing world, street-dated books amount to about 20 titles a month. These authors know who they are; we know who they are, too. These are the John Grishams, the Anne Rices, the Robert Jordans. But even if you are not in this magic group, read on.

It helps to understand how lead titles can affect your books on the shelves.

If you are among the chosen few, your publisher will flood the booksellers with attractive "Coming October 20" posters. Your bookseller will take reservations. One bookseller I spoke to, a Waldenbooks manager who did not want his name used, already had 80 orders for one author's book a month and a half before that magic date.

As the date draws closer, the bookseller will receive cartons of these books—numerous cartons—all stenciled with a warning to the effect: "Do not open (or sell) before October 20." Sometimes these books are unpacked and inventoried upon arrival, but they sit on special carts in the back, absolutely forbidden to be touched until the 20th.

The bookseller, as my anonymous source planned to do, may open up his shop at 8:30 a.m. on the 20th, sending notes advertising the fact to all those on his reservation list. In the pop music field, where the stars also have such release dates, stores open their doors to throngs of screaming fans at 12:01 a.m. I could not find a bookseller who went this far, but this is legally possible—and financially worth the seller's trouble.

"What a lot of hype," the rest of us may say with sour grapes in our mouths. But my use of the word "legal" in the previous paragraph was not used lightly. Earlier in this decade, booksellers on the West Coast sued publishing houses, complaining that they lost sales to stores closer to the warehouses. We are talking thousands and thousands of dollars worth of sales—enough to go to court over. HarperCollins announced their new policy arising out of such cases in *Publishers Weekly* on February 5, 1996:

Beginning next month, HarperCollins will ship all special releases in advance to wholesalers, retailers, and retail distribution centers so that shipments will arrive in retail stores up to one day before the designated on-sale date. Harper will assign special-release or laydown titles a uniform national on-sale date. Retailers who sell a laydown title before its on-sale date "will lose the privilege of receiving the next laydown title before the on-sale date."

Most publishers follow similar procedures. And this "privilege" is something booksellers take very, very seriously. Employees may not borrow the books; they may not peek in them on their lunch hour.

"It's just not worth my job, to go against the laydown date," my source said.

He told me how, earlier in his career, and while working for another bookstore, he made the mistake of pre-

maturely touching one of these special "laydown titles." A customer asked for the book to be shipped to him, and actually didn't get it until after the date. But the fact that the salesman packed up the book and sent it out the door before that date got him hauled onto the carpet.

Now he just says, "Never, never again."

The only exception would be if he walked down to the other end of the mall and saw that his competition had broken the release date. Then he would get in touch with his superiors at Waldens' headquarters, get their permission—in writing—to go ahead and stock the shelves. And then they might snitch on the competition to the publisher.

Anne Holmberg, a NINC writer who's also seen things from the bookseller's end, called my attention to an article in the *PW* of December 22, 1998. The latest in Brian Jacques' very popular young adult fantasy Redwall series was street dated for December 28. Odd, since this would mean a lot of disappointed kids on Christmas morning. Barnes & Noble got it early—early enough to be reported on December 22. B&N swears it was "a foul-up in distribution," but this didn't help the independents and other chains that were, understandably, hopping mad.

I spoke to another bookseller, Kimberly Larsen of Anderson News, who stocks my local grocery store with paperbacks. She showed me the list of top-ten titles she receives weekly. These are paperbacks, books that have already had their special day in hardcover. They get the same treatment in mass market. Beside each title is its particular date. If that date happens to be a Tuesday and she stocks my local store on a Monday, the store will not see that title until the following week. Sometimes she receives flyers about a special title, too, with warnings in big, black letters.

As an aside, this is how Kim works her shelves: in each genre area there are four tiers. When she arrives in the store each week, she shifts all the titles down to the tier below. She empties the lowest tier—which sends the titles off to be stripped—and fills the upper

tier with new titles.

In this case, special release date or no, each book gets four weeks to make it. Because I've taken the time to introduce myself to her, Kim puts my books in the racks in front, by the checkout lines, and leaves them there a tad longer. But that's just one store in the wide world.

Harlequin / Silhouette Romances

Maureen Stead of Harlequin/Silhouette explained that "our shipping is unique because we have so many different lines." H/S ships their 13 different lines in two monthly cycles. The line the author writes for determines when she can expect books in the stores. Books in the first cycle, such as Harlequin Presents, Intimate Moments, and the Spanish romances, "go out on the seventh of the month" previous to the stated release month. Superromances and promotional titles, among others, go out in the second cycle, on the 21st of the month.

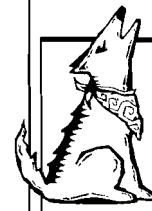
Booksellers with any sense of what's happening on their romance shelves will know when to expect the H/S series. "If you're an October Desire," said my loquacious Waldens' bookseller, "look at the end of September." But look fast, because as soon as November's Desires arrive, they will replace yours in this narrow window of opportunity.

"Different booksellers may have different policies," Ms. Stead warned me. And under no circumstances could books be shipped earlier for an early signing.

Still, there is much to be said for a system that is so pat that Harlequin/Silhouette can put out a handbook for their authors describing these dates and what should be done on the authors' end. I was not allowed a peek at this coveted handbook, but if you are at this house, you will have that much more help for your publicity efforts than the rest of us.

The Rest of Us

Random House's Tom Perry says that every one of their books gets its own "release date." This is approxi-



BREAKING NEWS

require that one of the principals associated with the film or screenplay be present."

Film entries must be submitted on videotape, NTSC Format, in English or with English sub-titles. Screenplays must be in English. The deadline for entries to be received is September 1.

For information in English contact: James Lloyd at: Telephone: 011-52-376-6-30-70 E-mail: jim2rob@laguna.com.mx

For more information on Ajijic and the festival, look at the Web site: <http://mexconnect.com/amex/cineindex.html>

MARKET OPP

Anyone thinking of trying to sell to Harlequin Presents, go for it! Tessa Shapcott, senior editor of Harlequin Presents, London, GB is actively looking to expand her North American author base, which is very small. There are about 30 Presents authors in the whole stable, and only four in North America. The door is wide open....

HARLEQUIN DISPUTE LACKS ROMANCE

In an April 1999 article for *The Globe and Mail*, Stephen E. Hume writes that Harlequin Enterprises, the world's largest publisher of romance novels, has launched a challenge that could crush a fledgling press from Winnipeg in a trademark dispute that is anything but sweet and sentimental. Harlequin says that the publisher, Ponder Romance, has infringed on the Harlequin trademark name. To force Ponder to drop the name, Harlequin has filed a statement of opposition under the Trade Marks

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mately three weeks after the "shipping date" and is the day when reviews and publicity for the book should appear. These three weeks allow time for the books to get on the shelves in bookstores across the country so they are there when the media blitz begins.

Only very few books are what he called "embargoed"—given a firm lay-down date before which they may not appear on the shelves. Such a book was the Monica Lewinski title for which there was legal paperwork to the effect that no one might sell the book until Barbara Walters had her exclusive interview with the young lady in question. Such publicity is "hugely expensive," Perry admits, and beyond the means of most members of Novelists, Inc. Otherwise, Random hopes the booksellers set books out as soon as they arrive.

I had heard rumors that St. Martin's was going to switch to a "release date equals on-shelf date" policy, but when I called during early March, the spokesperson told me their release date is three to four weeks after the books are shipped from the warehouse. St. Martin's releases books twice a month, similar to Harlequin/Silhouette, so if your book is scheduled for release in early October, you should gear your publicity for the last week of September.

Books appearing in the second half of the month should hold off until early-mid-October to avoid the risk of a radio interview sending readers out to the stores—only to find no books on the shelves yet.

Random and St. Martin's policies are quite different from what most of the fiction houses are going to.

When I first began research for this article, Yolanda Rodriguez of Tor/Forge told me that an average October mass market title would begin shipping from their Tennessee warehouse as early as the 17th of August for an "on-sale" date of September 8. To be on the safe side, she suggested

authors "coordinate with their publicist to determine the best time to set up events in a particular market to insure that books are fully distributed there."

However, when I returned to Ms. Rodriguez to okay her quotes, she gave me the news that Tor, conscious of the confusion, would begin a new policy in April 1999. As of that month's releases, on-sale date will equal the listed publication date.

Mary Jo Putney reports something of the same scenario for Penguin/Putnam, slated to take effect in October. "There will be an October 1 that is shipped in September, and an October 2 that will ship in October." Although "after that, release dates will match calendar dates." She has an "October 1" book and "hopes" that this "is a technicality that will have no effect on sales."

Steven Zacharius of Kensington/Zebra/Pinnacle told me that their October books go on sale "around" September 1. This was in November 1998 when he also hinted that "there has been some talk about changing the 'naming' of months so that the on-sale date will be the same as the publication date."

In February 1999, he told me the switch would be made in October 1999. They do this, he says, "to simplify the terminology of our business. There is no effect billing-wise or in any other regard. What will happen is that we will have two months called October, actually October A and October B, to straighten out the cycle."

Both Julie Pottinger, aka Julia Quinn, and Stef Ann Holm report an April switch-over for Avon.

An unidentified voice at Doubleday told me they give all their books an individual on-sale date, generally around the middle of the month. No book is released before that date.

Since Dell and Bantam are under the Doubleday umbrella, you'd think they'd have something like the same policy. Not so. Author Maureen Caudill says, "at the beginning of this year [1998], Bantam went to a firm pub-month-is-when-it's-really-out schedule for their paperbacks." They'd been doing it for longer with their hardcovers.

Stef Ann Holm reports the same 1998 switch-over for the new Sonnet Line from Pocket Books. Although I received no firm confirmation of this, Dell seems to have switched to a similar policy.

Anne Holmberg is able to give us a report from the trenches on how the switch has gone. "One of the oddities of this is that a March [1999] Bantam book is listed in the April Ingram catalog, since the catalog is based on the month the book appears on the stands. All well and good...but when the bookseller who told me of the situation wanted to order my March books...She looked in the March catalog to do it."

Distribution

A large distributor like Ingram promises me that bookstores will have any book within a day of the time these titles arrive in the half dozen or so centers scattered throughout the US. Certain regions—southern Texas and North Dakota, for example—may take as long as three days.

"Of course, it's up to the bookstore to place the order," I was told—and they promise no control over how long it will take books to get from the publisher to Ingram.

A much smaller distributor who works with regional presses spoke of up to 12 weeks from receiving books in their warehouse to getting them on the shelves in a big chain store. This Publishers Distribution Center, Inc. must also send salespeople to the stores in order to drum up shelf space.

What This Means For Writers

In the "old days," a less-than-bestselling author with infinite time and resources (how did that happen?)—might begin a booksigning tour for his October book the first week of September. He might push the enve-

lope with FedEx and begin on the East Coast, closer to the book's origin, working his way west like *Manifest Destiny* and ending in the more obscure corners of the nation at the end of October.

Now, more and more, it looks like there will be no envelope pushing. Stef Ann Holm is "glad. Now...I don't have to write 'Available mid-whatever' on the promo material." She also suspects that laydowns are used by publishers to "push" a title onto the best-seller list by concentrating sales, not scattering them all over the calendar. "This...may help more authors get on the bestseller lists."

Bantam author Teresa Medeiros, whose house switched to a first-of-the-month policy in 1998 reports that distributors love it. "It still causes confusion since everyone else does it the other way." But with the news of more and more houses switching, she hopes it will become a "popular decision for everyone once the kinks are worked out."

And, yes, Virginia, there are kinks.

Consider the unhappy bookseller when most of the books in her store would have to be taken down on September 30 and replaced by opening on the first—an impossible task.

From her experience in bookstores, Anne Holmberg sympathizes with the glitches in the system. "Local store managers, can *not* tell you for sure when a book will get there unless it's something big with a laydown date...That's neither the store's fault nor the chain's fault...but an unhappy reality of a distribution system that deals with hundreds...of thousands of books every week."

Holmberg saw the following scenarios on a weekly basis: "A couple of people out sick with the flu can mean books that readers are looking for are languishing in the storage bins waiting to be shelved, sometimes for weeks on end. Or shelves may already be so crowded that there's no room to fit in new books until some of the old books are sold or returned. Or the store got ten copies of a book, had room to shelve two, put the other eight in overstock, and managed to forget those eight copies existed until the strip list

forced someone to go looking for them."

Compound such misadventures by the increased volume of everyone hitting the first of the month together. Consider dealing with those hundreds of thousands of titles on one day.

Makes you feel rather insignificant and helpless, doesn't it? The author may have the ease of writing "available October 1999" on his publicity material, but it sounds to me as if he will have to work harder than ever to see his book is not lost in the shuffle of the bookseller's back room.

These policies, confusing as they are, are something writers must watch carefully. Start by understanding what the policy at your house is, what changes are in the offing, and by working as closely as possible with your publicity people.

One Happy Ending

So what do you suppose happened when I got down to small-town Utah, after the big chain store refused to sell me five of my own books early? That's right. The little store had all my titles, even the most recent, out on the shelves.

They'd already sold a handful.

NINK

(Ed: Due to space limitations, the table of information accompanying this article will be published in the July issue.)

Ann Chamberlin is the author of six historical novels, including The Reign of the Favored Women, which concludes a trilogy set in Ottoman Turkey. Leaving Eden, due out in July 1999 (whatever that means), is set in—yes—that Eden. The Merlin of St. Giles' Well is slated for October. Her publisher is Tor/Forge.

Shhhhh...overheard.....

According to PW, apparently the standing joke from BEA was the exhibitor who mentioned he'd had plenty of traffic—"both booksellers stopped by...."



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Cont. from page 5*

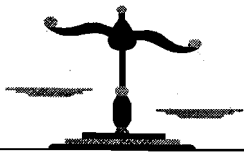
Act that could eventually force the smaller company out of business.

In the statement of opposition, filed with the Registrar of Trade Marks, Harlequin says the words "Ponder Romance" are "confusing" and indistinguishable from "the extensive use of [Harlequin's] trademarks in association with books in excess of over 40 years in Canada and around the world."

Ponder Romance, in business since 1997, is run by owner-editors and sisters Mary Barton and Pamela Walford, who say they will fight Harlequin for as long as they can afford it, but that a costly legal battle could force them out of business. Ponder Romance has published only three books, but is planning to enter the U.S. retail market.

Sharon Moon, Harlequin's legal affairs spokesperson, said the company's opposition to Ponder is clear. "We think the names, side by side, are confusing. People try to imitate us all the time because we're successful."

Harlequin's statement of opposition lists 30 Harlequin trademarks that it feels Ponder infringes upon, including Harlequin Romance, American Romance, Harlequin American Romance (and design), Harlequin Romantique, Superromance, and even Harlequin's Web site, **romance.net**. However, Moon said she did not know if the company had trademarked the word "romance" by itself. (According to Industry Canada's trademark database, the company disclaims the right to the exclusive use of the word "romance" apart from its trademarks.) **NINK**



Advocacy: *Getting Something Done*

This month, I wanted to briefly tell you guys about the first official project your Advocacy Committee has decided to undertake. So I'll tell you about that. But first....

As I write this, I'm looking at the May *Novelists' Ink*. At, specifically, the "Letters to the Editor."

Thanks, Judy.

I have to say, however, that the other Loveswept authors deserve a great deal of the credit for our success in regaining our rights. More than once in the past, I've found myself among groups of authors who couldn't even agree on how to approach a problem, much less how to solve one. But our Loveswept loop (we did most of this via e-mail, a wonderfully efficient time-saver) was made up of reasonable, professional authors who were perfectly able to discuss the problem and consider how best to solve it. And more than willing to take the next very necessary step and act individually to implement the group's decision as to the best way to proceed.

I think that's a very important point to make. We decided as a group what steps to take in order to regain our rights to those books. And then each author followed those steps. Nobody shouted, or threatened the publisher. And we didn't make a big deal about getting ourselves organized. We simply allowed the publisher to realize—from virtually identical letters requesting reversion of rights which were all addressed to the same person and all arriving within a relatively short time period—that the authors were quietly talking to each other at best. At worst, it could be assumed that we had hired legal help, or would if we were ignored yet again.

We were told (off the record) by someone inside the house that they got the point, assumed the writers were talking to each other, and decided to begin reverting the rights for that reason.

Of course, we have no way of knowing for sure if this effort forced an action that would not otherwise have (eventually) occurred. Maybe the house had planned to revert the rights at some point, and simply hadn't gotten around to it yet. Since Loveswept was a defunct line, after all, why not return print rights to the authors?

Then again, maybe they were eyeing the electronic-books market, and foresaw a day when having a library of 900+ romance novels might net them a nice little gold mine. Maybe that was why earlier efforts by individual authors had been met with either silence—or various excuses as to why nothing was being done.

We'll probably never know. I don't think that's very important anyway. The most important thing, and the major point I wanted to make about this, is that we were able to work as a group to get something done (on our time frame rather than the publisher's).

So keep that in mind, will you? Don't automatically

assume that you can't change a problem just because you're only one person. Chances are, there are other people out there trying to deal with the same problem. Maybe lots of people. And maybe, if one of you gets mad enough, or tired of going it alone—or just happens to be between books with time on your hands and energy to spare—you'll speak up and find those other people. Maybe start an e-mail loop. Toss around a few ideas.

And maybe even get something done.

Hey, you can try, can't you?

There is, by the way, another quiet group effort underway, and I'd like to wish those authors the best of luck in their endeavors. They'd like to try changing the unfair-to-writers clauses in the Harlequin boilerplate. I think that's a pretty cool goal to have, don't you?

As I said back at the beginning, your Advocacy Committee is working on its first official project for this year. Thanks to a suggestion made on the NINCLINK, we've decided to develop one or more Frequently Asked Questions sheets. These sheets will be available, both in paper form and online, to our membership and to other authors, as well as writers' organizations, journalists, and anyone else who might find them helpful or useful.

Their purpose will be to educate readers and other interested persons in both the creative side (anybody else tired of the "Where do you get your ideas?" question?) and the business side of writing and publishing. Not only will the sheets be handy to have available at signings and to add to our Web pages, but they will also help give NINC a presence and an authoritative voice outside our own industry. I don't know about you, but I'd love to hear our information and statistics quoted a lot more often in the media than some of those other sources we're all familiar with.

And, to reply to the tricky questions such as, "Why don't you want readers to buy your in-print books used?" I believe it will take some of the pressure off individual authors to be able to point to the "official" position of a major organization of writers, which states that position calmly and reasonably.

The committee is currently compiling the FAQ's about writing and publishing we've gathered from a poll taken on the NINCLINK and from other sources. My hope is that we'll have the sheets ready for the Board's approval within a matter of weeks, and that very soon afterward they'll be available for distribution to our membership.

In the meantime, if there are any Loveswept authors we missed contacting out there who want their rights reverted, please do get in touch. I'd be happy to give you our information. Online, I'm at KHooper@aol.com and my phone number is 828-247-1523.

And if any of the rest of you want to discuss something else you'd like to see Advocacy take on, let me know.

— Kay Hooper

Oh, My Aching...

Episode 3: "Look, Ma, No Glasses!"

I've tracked the development of corrective eye surgery for years, and wrote an article on laser refractive surgery for the July '97 *NINK*. After more than a year of waiting to get our schedules in synch, in September '98 my significant other and I flew to Calgary, and got our eyes zapped.

Briefly, people who are nearsighted (myopic) have corneas that are too thick, so light is focused incorrectly and objects at a distance are blurry. The excimer laser planes away the excess tissue, restoring normal vision. Currently the most popular procedure is LASIK ("flap and zap"), where a thin layer of the cornea is cut, leaving a hinge, and turned back. The excess cornea is planed away by the laser, and the flap is returned to its original position. Because the epithelial cells on the surface of the eye have been preserved, healing begins immediately. This is a much smarter, gentler procedure than RK, the earlier form of correction, where spoke-like incisions were cut into the eye. (Yuck!)

We were given exhaustive eye exams to map our corneas so the computer controlled laser would know exactly what to do. Despite my research and the knowledge that LASIK is very safe and effective, I was skittish as a hound on roller blades on the day of surgery. Wisely the clinic offered mild sedatives when we arrived at the surgical suite. I jumped on mine.

Anticipation was worse than the reality. LASIK turned out to be truly painless. The patient is laid out in a sort of flat dental chair, and a nurse puts in "freezing drops," a local anesthetic that numbs the eye. Then a drape to flatten the lashes, and a lid speculum to prevent blinking. Above the face is a piece of equipment with a green light to stare at during the surgery. Our surgeon, Dr. Howard Gimbel (the first doctor in North America to do laser corrective surgery), explained each step as he went along—when things would get dark, the placement of the suction ring, etc. (John and I were offered the chance to see each other in surgery. No way!)

The flap was cut and turned back, followed by a flurry of laser buzzes. Then the flap was cleaned, replaced, and aligned, and it was over in minutes. John emerged from surgery saying, "I can read the exit sign!" A landmark in vision for him.

We were staying at a B&B a block and a half away, and the nice owner had offered to come and walk us home when we were ready. However, we felt up to making the trip on our own, through two traffic lights. Transparent plastic egg cups glued over each eye socket and supplied sunglasses over those, we made our way back to our room, making jokes about the blind leading the blind, and napped

By MARY JO PUTNEY

a few hours as suggested.

Three nights of sleeping with the egg cups lay ahead, and lots of eye drops for the first week or so. Though we were given pain medication prescriptions, neither of us needed them. (Some patients do experience pain, but it's rare.)

The next morning we had follow-up exams. I was about 20/30 in one eye, 20/40 in the other, a level of vision I hadn't had since first grade. Then we went off to the airport, and home. (I've since improved to 20/20 and 20/30.) Most clinics offer free "enhancements" for the next year or two. Basically, this is fine-tuning to give you the very best possible vision. However, John and I have come so close to optimum vision for our ages that we will probably not bother with enhancements.

The eye's focus changes as soon as the surgery takes place. In researching the topic, I heard people say things like "I could read license plates in the parking lot instantly!" However, no one ever mentioned the fact that everything is blurry. (The literature vaguely describes this as "haze," but trust me, blurriness is a better description.)

At night, lights are haloed. Rather pretty, actually, and not a problem. As the eyes heal, the haloes dimmed and went away at the same rate the blurriness diminished. Typically healing takes about three months, though minor improvements can continue afterward. The more nearsighted you were, the fuzzier things are after surgery, and the longer it takes to heal.

Though we could see things at a distance, neither of us could read anything smaller than a newspaper headline because we're both over 40 and have presbyopia, "aging eyes." This means decreasing flexibility of the lens, and is why even people with perfect vision in youth usually end up needing reading glasses or bifocals. Because LASIK cures myopia but not presbyopia, John and I both need reading glasses now. Considering that neither of us could read without glasses before, I don't consider this unreasonable, though it would have been nice to have gotten the surgery at age 25 and had 15 years of glasses-free existence before presbyopia set in. However, they didn't have LASIK then.

C'est la vie.

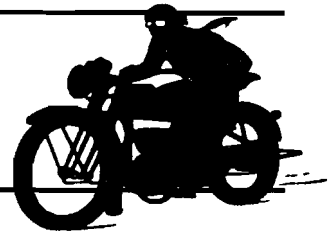
I do wish we'd been told to bring a couple of pairs of cheap drugstore reading glasses in the +2.50 range. At customs in Calgary, we had to throw ourselves on the mercy of the customs agent, because there was no way we could read the customs form. Luckily, he was a sport.

On the way home, I looked around Denver Airport and realized that for the first time in our adult lives, John and I were in public without glasses. Though we couldn't read fine print, we could make our way through the airport and see flight monitors, wall

Continued on page 11 ▶ ▶ ▶

DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

Dispatches from the Front is a "war stories" feature. If something funny, black comedy to slapstick, happens to you, send it in. Anonymity will be preserved, of course, if you desire it.



Amidst the Wastes of Time, Part II

So, seven months after I purchase my brand-new space-age already-obsolete computer, my modem stops working. Just like that. And since I have to e-mail a revised short story to an editor by the end of the day, I'm eager to resolve this little problem right away. So I call tech support at their 1-800 number.

Three hours and two lengthy telephone calls later, the modem still isn't working, and tech support has by now ensured that most of the software is erased or malfunctioning, all of my e-mail addresses have disappeared into a black hole, and the computer cannot communicate with either of my printers. Tech support now casts runes and determines that, gosh!, I evidently have a hardware problem (such as, oh, the modem?) and they can't help me with that. I'll need to take the computer to the dealer's repair shop.

Since the printer the dealer sold me with the computer has been smudging and smearing lately, I decide to take that in for repairs at the same time. I also strongly suggest to the dealer that seven months was rather too long to let me go without a functioning printer driver and perhaps it's time to provide me with one. (And if they could be less snarky about it than they were the first four times I requested one, that would be all to the good.) I take my other printer to a different shop, the only shop in the tri-state area, which is authorized to repair it. Despite the money I have recently invested in upgrading it, it still thinks for five minutes before printing each manuscript page from my new (but already obsolete) word processing program, so perhaps it needs more memory.

Drivers, memory, and software corruption are all things I deeply resent having to learn about, let alone broach with sullen computer professionals somewhat less communicative than a really precocious broccoli. While I'm busy broaching, a respectable looking middle-aged customer at the next counter has a noisy nervous breakdown. His computer has been in the repair shop since the Late Cretaceous and there's still no diagnosis or ETA. I try to comfort him by explaining that this dealer's chief competitor actually lost my friend's machine seven months after he dropped it off for repairs, so things could be worse. Sadly, my efforts fail to soothe him, and he has to be taken outside and shot for his own good.

Nine days later, the dealer's repair shop phones me. Guess what, they cry—the modem isn't working! It's taken them only nine days to identify the problem, which I wrote down on the repair invoice. During this same amount of time, I have failed to progress on my book. And they now inform me that I will be unable to progress for at least another 12 days, since that's how long it will take a pack horse to bring a new modem from the salt mines of Mars. On the other hand, the printer is all ready to come home! But a printer driver? One that might actually work? Am I

By **LAURA RESNICK**

sure I need one that works? Because, you know, many people lead rich and fulfilling lives without actually using their printers.

Since I can't sit twiddling my thumbs for another 12 days, I break down and decide to buy a laptop. So, instead of progressing on my book, I give myself a one-day crash-course in laptops and then purchase one via mail-order. It arrives the following week. It spends the next few days crashing at regular intervals. Tech support goes through a period of schizophrenia: sometimes they won't help me, at other times they can't help me. Microsoft and AOL, however, are more consistent, remaining firmly in the can't help camp (and trying to sell me additional software and services the whole time I keep explaining that I just want the ones I already have to work).

In frustration, I try to return the laptop. That's when I discover the one important question I completely forgot to ask when I purchased it: the mail-order company does not accept returns, and they deduct a 20% "restocking fee" for any equipment a customer wants to exchange or get credit for.

I begin plotting a novel wherein the hero is a serial killer who only murders people in the computer industry.

I also tell the mail-order company that they've sent me the laptop without a system CD, which is sort of like a Big Mac without the burger. The shipping department forgot to include it (the CD I mean; the burger was there). They promise to send it right away, estimating it will arrive in another five days. (Two phone calls, an angry letter, and many weeks later, it still hasn't arrived.)

In the end, an amateur computer-guru friend solves my problems over the phone and gets the laptop up and running. The simplicity of his solutions perhaps comes from his clever investigative technique, i.e. asking me what's wrong and listening to my responses. It would be unreasonable of me, I now realize with growing compassion, to expect the same of computer professionals, all of whom were evidently dropped on their heads as babies.

Around the time the laptop is finally working, the desktop computer is ready to come home. Within days, my second printer is ready to come home, too! All of my space-age equipment is now back home, only four weeks after it broke down! A miracle!

It takes me only another three days to get the desktop computer up and running. (The dealer's shop has refused to attempt to repair the damage which tech support did to the software, and in my newfound pity for their disabilities, I don't press the issue. Especially not when they tell me it'll cost me \$50 just for them to look at the software.) I take only one additional day (during which time, to my eternal shame, I relieve a little of my pent-up frustration by picking a fight with a grizzly bear who will now never be the same) to get the desktop computer working

“LOOK MA, NO GLASSES”

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 9*

menus, etc. After decades with Coke bottle glasses grafted to my face every waking moment, to be able to see without them was stunning.

We could comfortably watch a video when we got home late Friday, and we both felt up to driving the next morning—carefully, in our own neighborhood. And we drove right to a drugstore to get those cheap reading glasses so we could read the newspaper. We were both functional as soon as we got reading glasses, so there was no down-time from work, though the clinic suggests not reading or using a computer for two days.

The one thing that a myope loses in refractive surgery is the ability to take off glasses and see things clearly close up, even if you had to put the object on your nose. I miss that, but I knew in advance that I'd lose my built-in microscope, and I considered it worthwhile. It's incredible to look out my bedroom window and see pine needles, not green blurs. To have peripheral vision. To see the bedside clock at night. The inside of the shower. (That one's a mixed blessing!)

I've heard it suggested that LASIK might leave eyes more light sensitive. Perhaps that happens sometimes, but I was very light sensitive before the surgery, and am actually less so now. If you have this done, people who have known you for years will say things like “You've changed your hair, haven't you?” They know something is different, but can't figure out what. Naturally, I'm fond of those who say, “You look so much younger!”

A month after the surgery I went to the NINC conference in Tahoe and found one member who'd had the surgery the week before, and another who'd been zapped ten months earlier and was fully healed. I know of other NINC members who've had refractive surgery also. The surgery is becoming more and more common, with ecstatic customers being the best advertisement.

We chose Dr. Gimbel for several reasons. First and most important, Canadian surgeons have done laser refractive surgery longer than Americans, so they have

more experience. At -9 diopters my vision was pretty bad, but at -13, John was so near-sighted that he couldn't have had LASIK done in

the US except through an experimental program, and who wants to be a guinea pig? In Calgary John was corrected to 20/30, a result that amazed his eye doctor back home when he went in for follow-up visits.

Another reason for Canada was that with the Canadian dollar down, it's a real bargain. Typically, LASIK costs \$2,000-\$2,500 per eye in the US. The current price for going to the Gimbel Clinic is \$3,100 for both eyes if you want Gimbel himself, \$2,750 if you choose one of his very competent colleagues—and that cost includes airfare from the US, and your hotel stay! There are other fine Canadian clinics as well. We chose Gimbel because a college roommate of mine who is an eye surgeon bullied me until I agreed to go to Calgary. Gimbel's Web site, www.gimbel.com, is a good place to research refractive surgery even if you prefer to have it done closer to home.

There are increasing numbers of experienced American ophthalmologists, so you have plenty of choices, but be sure to find out how many procedures the doctor has done. In a study just released by Emory University, 14 eye surgeons were tracked for 574 patients during 1995 and 1996. Only three of the doctors had extensive experience with the procedure. The other 11 had no experience, but had received “extensive didactic and practice instruction.”

(!)

Not surprisingly, the study showed an inverse relationship between experience and complications, meaning that it really pays to go to the most experienced surgeon you can find, especially if you are a high myope. I don't have Gimbel's statistics, but I suspect that the complication rate for his clinic is near zero. Even in the Emory study, with all those inexperienced surgeons practicing their skills on innocent patients, resultant vision of less than 20/40 was very rare. This is a very safe and efficacious procedure.

The last reason for going to Calgary was to take a nifty vacation in the Canadian Rockies beforehand, where we became possibly the only tourists in history never to see elk. “You didn't see elk?” people in Calgary asked in amazement—but that's another story. *NINK*

DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

with both printers. Some blood sacrifices are necessary to get the laptop working with the printers, but I anticipated that and have some livestock on hand, so it's no big deal.

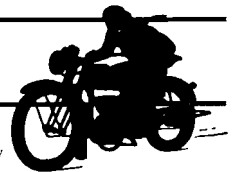
And, hey, the \$200 I invested in adding memory to the second printer? Well worth it! It now only thinks for four and a half minutes before printing each page!

Thanks to my sophisticated-if-obsolete new system and software, I can now print—not to mention write—a book in only

triple the time that it used to take me on my old DOS computer.

Ain't progress grand?

Laura Resnick currently resides in a maximum-security mental institution where she is undergoing intensive treatment for cyber-psychosis. In time and with your support, a cure may be found.





The number of listserves continues to grow. Computer-Assisted Research and Reporting (CARR-L) is a listserv for journalists involved in computer aided reporting, covering topics ranging from what systems are being used in newsrooms to how to find information online. To find the answers to questions such as "If we publish on the network, what is the status of the copyright? Can I use Internet messages in my story? Should I use Internet messages?" or to subscribe to the list, visit www.jmk.su.se/dig/guide/listservs/carr-l.html.

"Holt Uncensored" is an online column about books and the book industry written by former *San Francisco Chronicle* book editor and critic Pat Holt. You can subscribe by going to www.nciba.com/patholt.html.

Project Gutenberg is a site developed by Michael Hart of the University of Illinois. His eventual goal is to have all public domain works available for e-reading and easy access. To visit the site and see what is currently available and planned for the future, visit www.gutenberg.net.

If you build your own Web page, MediaBuilder at www.mediabuilder.com is a wonderful source of free backgrounds, borders, fonts, etc. that you can use to enhance your Web page. To register your Web page with search engines or to find free tips on promoting yourself on the Web, visit www.addme.com. At the site, you can also subscribe to their newsletter.

Book Search Engine is a new online search engine designed for books, authors, bookstores, etc. You'll want to visit and see that your Web site is included at www.booksearchengine.com/. And don't forget to take advantage of all that Amazon Bookstore offers in the way of promotion. For information on what authors can do to promote their books, go to www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/subst/partners/authors/authors.html.

For research, check out the Advance Book Exchange for out of print books at www.abebooks.com/. The Online Public Access Catalogue at <http://opac97.bl.uk/> reveals what material is held in the major Reference and Document Supply collections of the British Library.

"Why was traditional navigation impossible in the south Atlantic?" That's one of the many questions to which you'll find answers regarding the oceans and historical travel by sea at www.ruf.rice.edu/~feegi/index.html. And where you find the sea, you often find lighthouses. A PBS series companion site www.pbs.org/legendarylighthouses gives you the opportunity to look at and learn about lighthouses from all over America.

In 1808 the British Parliament passed an Act requiring all counties to establish an asylum to care for the in-

sane. For more information, visit www.appi.org/ajp/apr98/imagepsy.html. An illustration of the asylum is available. You can find a history of the Bethlem Royal ("The names 'Bethlem and the more notorious 'Bedlam' by which it was known for several centuries, are both medieval variants of the original 'Bethlehem'.")) and the Maudsley Hospitals at www.iop.bpmf.ac.uk/home/trust/750/brhstory.htm. More information on Bethlem and the history of insanity can be found at www2.cwrl.utexas.edu/~scoggins/britishprojects/kinglear/med.html.

Need an earthquake to set your story into motion? Looking for an obscure war where your mercenary can become a hero? With a single glance, the Historical Atlas of World History answers 20th century questions with a picture: www.erols.com/mwhite28/20centry.htm.

Those interested in screenwriting can keep up with the latest at www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9902/23/sony.screenwriters/.

I know April 15 has passed, but taxes are something we writers need to keep in mind all year long—especially when determining business expenses and deductions. The Writer's Pocket Tax Guide can offer you some assistance at www.foolscap-quill.com/wptg99.html. IRS tax forms and publications can be found at www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/forms_pubs/index.html.

Sponsored by C-Span, The Business of Books offers panel discussions and programs on the industry. For a current schedule and to see what else the site offers, visit www.booktv.org/business/schedule.asp.

Well, as you can see, this month I had no theme. Rather, I engaged in a little spring-cleaning and tried to reduce my "suggestion" file. If you want to recommend sites or have an interest in a particular theme, please e-mail me at LorraineHe@aol.com. The Internet has so much that it can be overwhelming.

A CORRECTION: It's come to my attention that there appears to be an error or a change with the historical romance listserv URL that appeared in the May Online column. My apologies for the inconvenience. When I've run down the right URL, I'll republish it.

And don't forget, if you are not already subscribed to NINCLINK, you are missing out on some informative discussions. This month, discussions ranged from Horatio Hornblower to various Mail Manager systems. To subscribe, send an e-mail:

To: LISTSERV@PEACH.EASE.LSOFT.COM

Subject: Your-NINC-Membership-Name (as it appears in the roster)

Body: SUBSCRIBE NINCLINK Your-First-Name Your-Last-Name

See you online!

— Lorraine Heath





EAST OF THE HUDSON

DON'T TRY THIS IN YOUR OWN HOME

One of the advantages (?) of being in the book business is that you get insider access to reader's copies. There's nothing like being at a cocktail party and being able to say "I just finished the new Tom Wolfe novel, the one that will be released to the public in six months." The poor civilian you're talking to has no response to that kind of dig. He'll have to wait until the book is piled high at Costco and featured in the window displays at the superstores to get his copy and he will spend the whole time being envious of you.

(Like I say, I get smaller and smaller in my old age.)

Anyway, I was really stoked a few weeks ago when I heard that one of my favorite writers of all time, the reclusive and difficult Thomas Harris, had just delivered his newest novel, his first in ten years. Now that's an advance reader's copy really worth having. *Silence of the Lambs*, Harris's last, sold ten million copies. I don't know a sensible reader who didn't love it. The film made from the book won every Academy Award you can imagine. It introduced a whole generation of gourmets to the joys of fava beans and Chianti. I set to work immediately trying to score an early look, just so I could feel like I was really wired into the mainstream culture.

I'm beginning to think, though, that my efforts are going to be for naught. It seems that the new Thomas Harris will probably be in stores just about the time you are reading this. The release date is June 8 and the publisher is looking for a one-day laydown of at least 500,000 copies.

At the same time, the novel will become a Book of the Month main selection and its audio version will be on sale.

In other words, the sequel to *Silence of the Lambs* will go from a manuscript delivered on March 23 to an international best seller on June 9. That's astonishing, particularly to someone like me, who once had an editor tell him that it was virtually impossible to properly publish a book in less than 12 months.

The release is even more astonishing when you consider that Delacorte, the publisher, didn't really have advance notice that Harris was about to deliver. The way I hear the story, Carole Baron, president and publisher, heard a knock on the door of her office on March 23. When she answered, someone handed her a package and said, "This just came in. You might want to open it."

I haven't talked to Baron so I don't know if the story is true. In fact, I don't want to question the story at all. The mental image of a publisher ripping open an envelope and seeing the title page of a surefire Number One is just too piquant....

.... particularly when that publisher shelled out the first portion of the advance for said book a full ten years ago. Talk about a head rush. Delacorte had been on the hook for

some substantial portion of \$5.75 million since the days when the Dow was back in the low four figures. But the minute Baron saw the title, she must have felt like she had bought amazon.com at \$10 a share. I mean, the title alone is brilliant: *Hannibal*. Just a name, but it's going to sell a megaton of books all by itself.

I didn't bring this up merely to plug the book. Harris is an old wire service reporter, like me, but he doesn't need my help or anybody else's. He is golden. As a matter of fact, he is so golden that he can do almost everything wrong and be successful.

For instance, he can be a decade late with a manuscript. I know writers who are a few weeks or a few months late and who receive warnings from their publisher about the need for professional discipline. I have heard editors lecture first-time bestsellers about the importance of building an audience by producing another book exactly 12 months later. Or six months later, in a few cases.

Then there's the issue of building a backlist. A successful author has to take up at least two feet of shelf space at a B&N superstore, we are taught. Yet Harris has produced a total of three other books since *Black Sunday*, his first, in 1973.

Add to that the value of showing the flag. Self-promotion of the sort we all flog ourselves to do is vital; it has to be heaped on top of whatever our publisher does in the way of marketing. Right?

Yeah, right. That's why Tom Harris gets away with being the most complete recluse since J. D. Salinger. I can't recall seeing a single interview with the man. I certainly have never seen him on Oprah or Charlie Rose or the "Today Show." Hell, I don't think I've ever even seen an autographed copy of one of his books.

I don't get it. I just don't get it. Harris is difficult, yet the more difficult he becomes, the more his publisher seems to do for him. He is distant, but the more elusive he is the more his public pants after him. He writes one book every ten years or so and each of them has more impact than the last. In other words, Thomas Harris is doing everything in the world you can do to kill your career as a popular writer and he's about to have the biggest success a writer has had since.... Well, I may be getting carried away because the returns aren't in yet, but I am willing to bet that Thomas Harris will be as big among readers this summer as George Lucas is among film-goers.

And he's doing it by breaking most of the rules I have thought valid in today's book business. He reminds me of the stunt drivers featured in television ads, the ones whose work is so impressive that a disclaimer has to be scrolled across the screen beneath the picture: "Do not try this in your own home."

I guess there is such a thing as a good ► ► ► ►



EAST OF THE HUDSON

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book. Maybe that's where all of this hoopla called publishing begins.

Hmmmmmm!

HOORAY? FOR HOLLYWOOD?

In honor of the reformulated American Booksellers Assn. Convention, now called the Book Exposition of America (or some other combinations of words that yields the acronym "BEA"), *Publishers Weekly* cobbled together a piece on the present state of the relationship between Tinseltown and the book business. It seems that the hot-cold mix is running cold at the moment.

Just a couple of years ago, a new trend seemed to be developing wherein the cart drove the horse. That is to say, novels were being sold first to Hollywood for beaucoup bucks and then optioned, as it were, by New York publishers.

The leader of this trend seemed to be Nicholas Evans's *The Horse Whisperer*, which was purchased outright by Robert Redford for \$3 million before Delacorte/Dell bought the literary rights for somewhat less.

There followed a couple of other similar sales. I wrote extensively about one that yielded a literary goulash called *The Eleventh Horseman*. The book was the original "high concept" mish-mash, the product of a writer, an epidemiology expert, a book packager, a manuscript doctor, and several highly placed editors at HarperCollins. Not surprisingly, the book died in the stores and a second book in the contract was, as far as I know, never published.

The whole thing never would have happened, I now understand, except that the novel was shopped around Hollywood even before it went to New York. A major sale to one of the studios was all that was necessary to ignite interest among the East-of-the-Hudson types who control the book business. Boppa-da-bing, boppa-da-boom, we've got a sure-fire bestseller.

Except that the match wasn't strong enough. The conflagration never took place.

So I wasn't surprised when *Publishers Weekly* discovered much consternation among the book/film professionals who scout for literary properties to turn into movie megahits or vice versa.

"Everything we used to believe was true isn't, anymore," said Ron Bernstein, head of an agency which specializes in these projects. "A big film sale doesn't mean a book deal will happen. A big-brand author doesn't automatically get a film deal."

That's the kind of Cartesian circle that's always wrong, but since we are talking about perceived business trends, such syllogisms are always powerful because they influence the judgment of the doofuses who sometimes call the shots

in publishing. The general belief popular at the moment is that films and books do not always work in lock-step. A good sale one place doesn't mean hot prospects elsewhere.

On the other hand, it does seem clear that there are going to be more tie-in book projects in the near future, thanks principally to the kinds of movies that are being made at the moment. The titanic success of James Cameron's *Titanic* spun off several books that sold well; the new *Star Wars* release this summer will undoubtedly do the same.

And movie tie-ins are, as always, creating new opportunities for books like *A Civil Action*, *Green Mile*, etc. But interestingly, there are a few book types who are saying that movie connections are two-edged. The paperback of *Message in a Bottle*, for instance, was released at the same time as the Kevin Costner movie, but Warner, which had a legitimate bestseller on its hands, chose not to use Costner's likeness on the paperback cover.

"Because this was the first paperback edition of the book, we didn't want to present it just as a movie tie-in edition," Warner's Jamie Raab said.

The reading audience grasps the subtle hierarchy that has sprung up in the book business, Raab claims. That realization is so clear that it may have hurt potential sales of the novelized *Stepmom*, a weeper that starred Julia Roberts and Susan Sarandon.

"It was a really good novelization," Raab said. "Maybe we should have presented it more as a book."

My own experiences with Hollywood proved one thing to me: the surest way to get a book made into a film is by interesting a star in it. In my own case, Richard Chamberlain, a bankable actor (one whose presence can get backing for a film) took a liking to *All The Winters That Have Been*. He liked the book so much, bless him, that he rejected the first screenplay for the project and demanded a rewrite that brought the film more closely in line with the novel.

Star power is still the way many films are made, to wit, *Horse Whisperer*. The trend has even progressed to the point that a bankable star like "Mad About You" 's Helen Hunt approached Spenser creator Robert B. Parker to create a female detective character. *PW* says that Parker's fall book, *Family Honor*, is the result.

But the conclusion I draw from all this is that we, as writers, can't hope to build careers and make decisions on the basis of what are perceived to be trends in the book/film business. That's probably because there aren't really any trends out there, merely a few discrete incidents. It's perfectly human to seek order in the chaos of our business, but in the end, that stuff in the bottom of the cup is still tea leaves and water.

Books, films, television scripts, documentaries: all these things are really expressions of those ephemeral things called ideas. An idea can be cobbled into a satisfying novel, an intriguing movie, and several commercially successful tie-ins. But far more often than not, the book will be disjointed, the film will be lukewarm and the commercial tie-ins will be thin.

In other words, I'm glad I'm not working for some

international media conglomerate intent on making millions from forced synergy.

And I'm doubly glad I'm not trying to create a magazine specializing in articles and stories which can be instantly transmuted into film projects, as some of the brightest lights in the world of ideas are apparently doing.

That's the kind of inbred process that yields children who are narrow between the eyes.

SUPERSTORE SUPERCILIOUSNESS

Borders Group, Inc., Number Two in the big-box book business, took a bit of a header last month when the new chief executive Philip M. Pfeffer departed. Or was departed, depending on whose verb conjugation you accept.

Pfeffer had come to Borders from Random House, where he appeared to have lost the struggle for power after Bertelsmann acquired the publishing house. Before that, he was president of Ingram Distribution Group. In other words, the guy has been around in the book business.

I don't pretend to understand all the nuances of this particular news item. I'm not that sophisticated. I only throw it out because it's a reminder of the true nature of the business we are in. Pfeffer was a major player in the big picture with all the right moves and tremendous insights

into the future of books, publishing, and bookselling.

(Count the clichés in that last sentence: I think there are four. Since I am a huge hockey fan, I've been watching a lot of sports broadcasters recently and I've discovered the importance of numerous clichés.)

Now, sadly, he is roadkill, a victim of the turmoil in the book business. I don't know if he was the author of the decisions that made Borders number two in the superstore business. Probably not, since he had only been on the job for five months. I don't even know if he was the one who decided Borders ought to eschew the World Wide Web and concentrate instead on traditional brick-and-board bookstores.

All I really know is that he tangled with Robert F. DiRomualdo, chairman of Borders. And when the CEO tangles with the chairman, we can usually guess who loses.

Which brings me to the real reason for all this maundering: Did you know where Borders, the big book company came from? The sausage business. That's right. The DiRomualdo family of Ann Arbor, Michigan experienced its first, and probably biggest, success with Hickory Farms, the mall-based purveyor of ground comestibles.

Somehow, that particular fact had eluded me ▶ ▶ ▶

ON WITH THE OLD, ON WITH THE NEW!



They say there's nothing new under the sun, and we're going to prove that at the NINC conference in Savannah by going back to our origins and also by trying something new. The "back to the future" part of

the program is, of course, our discussion group format. We tried having outside speakers and panels for a couple of years, and what people consistently said they liked most were the discussion groups. So we're going back to more discussion groups. In case you've never been to a NINC conference, in a discussion group, there is no "speaker," since everyone in the room is a professional and potentially knows just as much as everyone else. A moderator introduces the subject, asks some provocative questions, and lets the folks in the room do the talking. Some people share experiences or information, some people ask more questions, some people offer suggestions, and some people just listen. Nothing is off-limits, and real information exchange takes place. I've learned more from these discussion groups than I ever learned from any panels of experts.

We're going to have three kinds of discussion

groups, too. The Night Owls, on Thursday night, will be the specialized topics, kind of quirky and different. The Author Discussion Groups on Friday morning will be a little more general in topic. The Professional Discussion Groups will be the same only with editors, agents, and other industry professionals in attendance, sharing their unique perspectives.

And if you like to learn amazing things from experts, don't despair. We're going to have outside speakers coming in on Friday and Saturday afternoons to talk about all sorts of fascinating topics. I'd love to give you a hint, but we don't have final confirmation yet, so you'll just have to wait for the brochure. Next month. It's coming soon!

And finally, we're instituting a new kind of session at the conference: Breakfast with the Editors. We're offering every editor in attendance the opportunity to meet with small groups of authors during breakfast on Sunday. Maybe a table full, maybe a couple tables full. To talk about whatever they want. To meet with their own authors or potential authors. Whatever. The kind of small-group attention you never receive at most conferences.

So if you want to really dig in and learn more about the business or the art of writing, NINC is the place. See you in Savannah!

— **Victoria Thompson,**
Conference Coordinator



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until very recently. When I discovered it for the first time, things suddenly became clear. The book business isn't about books any more; it is about retail

marketing. I knew that. I really did. But every once in a while, I still stumble across a single fact that underlines the truth for me. Random House and Hickory Farms, what a connection.

Maybe that's why so many of the books I pick up today read like they've been run through a meat grinder. And in case you get the wrong idea, I spend more of my book dollars in Borders than I do almost anywhere else.

What that says about me and sausage, I'll leave to your imagination.

— **Evan Maxwell**



The Fast Track

Compiled by MARILYN PAPPANO

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 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	April 1	April 8	April 15	April 22	April 29
Suzanne Forster	<i>Every Breath She Takes</i> , Jove	96				
Barbara Freethy	<i>The Sweetest Thing</i> , Avon	104				
Dorothy Garlock	<i>With Song</i> , Warner			60n	37	57
Leigh Greenwood	<i>The Cowboys: Sean</i> , Leisure	134				
Tami Hoag	<i>Ashes to Ashes</i> , Bantam	51	80	88	87	125
Joan Hohl	<i>Silver Thunder</i> , Zera		204	140		
Linda Howard	<i>An Independent Wife</i> , Mira				82n	63
Susan Johnson	<i>A Touch of Sin</i> , Bantam	133				
Katherine Kingsley	<i>The Sound of Snow</i> , Avon				62n	56
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Flash</i> , Pocket	62	73	111		
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Jade Island</i> , Avon			29n	19	42
Debbie Macomber	<i>Moon over Water</i> , Mira				58n	32
Teresa Medeiros	<i>Charming the Prince</i> , Bantam		245	20	24	38
Linda Lael Miller	<i>Springwater Seasons: Jessica</i> , Sonnet		40n	37	76	
Amanda Quick	<i>I Thee Wed</i> , Bantam			40n	70	130
Julia Quinn	<i>Howto Marry a Marquis</i> , Avon	109	144			
J.D. Robb	<i>Conspiracy in Death</i> , Berkley	22	44	70	110	
Nora Roberts	<i>The MacGregors: Daniel, Ian</i> , Silhouette	12	23	43	73	99
Nora Roberts	<i>River's End</i> , Putnam	43	58	87	111	135
Nora Roberts	<i>The Perfect Neighbor</i> , Silhouette	56	74	90	144	
Nora Roberts	<i>Homeport</i> , Jove			4N	3	6
Bertrice Small	<i>Innocent</i> , Fawcett		178	122		
Barbara Dawson Smith	<i>Too Wicked to Love</i> , SMP	140				
Antoinette Stockenberg	<i>Keepsake</i> , SMP			117n	127	
Susan Wiggs	<i>The Charm School</i> , Mira				157n	108

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