

# Novelists'



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

## **HALLMARK HALL OF FAME PRESENTS:**

# ***“A Season for Miracles”: A book to movie event***

**BY MARILYN PAPPANO**

Early in our writing careers, some friends and I were discussing our goals. We had the usual—we wanted to continue to sell books, to win awards, get good reviews, make the Waldenbooks' bestseller list, and make enough money to support ourselves—and then there were the pipe dreams. Making the *New York Times* list. Coming out in hardcover. Seeing one of our masterpieces turned into a movie.

Well, I'm not on the *NYT* list, and my only hardcover is a Doubleday Book Club edition, but for Christmas this past year I got a movie of one of my books—and not just a movie, but a Hallmark Hall of Fame movie. A *wonderful* Hallmark Hall of Fame movie. And it's been one of the highlights of my life.

It started in June 1997 when my agent, Andrea Cirillo, mentioned in conversation that she'd sent an ARC of my upcoming book, *Season for Miracles*, to the Los Angeles film

agent she works with and he felt pretty confident that we could get an option on it. That alone was a huge thrill for me. I remember telling some friends in my local writers' group, and the squeals of excitement they let out rocked the entire restaurant. It was fun and exhilarating for a time, but I never really expected anything more to come of it. After all, the majority of movie deals went to the big guys—those *NYT* authors—and I certainly wasn't in their league. Just knowing that an LA film agent thought I'd written something good enough to consider was enough for me.

For about a week. Until Thursday, July third, rolled around. That was when Andrea called to tell me that the film agent had gotten a call from Hallmark Hall of Fame, advising him that they intended to make a formal offer for the book after the weekend. “Hallmark Hall of Fame?” I whispered in awe. “I *love* their movies!”

My husband Bob and I agreed that we wouldn't share the news with anyone until it was a done deal, and we didn't. But I'll admit, it was awfully hard going to an **Cont. on Page 7** ▶ ▶ ▶

## ***Taking the Pulse of Historical Mysteries***

---

### **Also in this Issue:**

President's Voice .....	2
Letters to the Editor.....	3
Before Vancouver: Bookfest .....	4
Breaking News .....	6
Vancouver: The Muse.....	10
Online .....	11
The Comely Curmudgeon.....	13
Fast Track .....	16
Roster 2000.....	Center

---

**BY KATHY LYNN EMERSON**

At the NINC conference in Savannah, Victoria Thompson repeated an opinion she'd heard expressed in the book world, that the historical mystery genre owes its current popularity to the success of Caleb Carr's *The Alienist*. Without taking time to think through my response, I blurted out a denial—loudly and, I fear, rudely. Her comment startled me. It also started

me thinking.

My protest was based on the fact that I knew of so many historical mysteries published before Carr's book came out in 1994, series by Peter Lovesey (starting with *Wobble to Death* in 1970), Elizabeth Peters (*Crocodile on the Sandbank*, 1975), Ellis Peters (*A Morbid Taste for Bones*, 1977), and Anne Perry (*The Cater Street Hangman*, 1979). There were also numerous series written under a whole string of pseudonyms by **M i c h a e l** **Cont. on Page 5** ▶ ▶ ▶

## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

### Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne†	Linda Barlow
Janice Young Brooks†	Georgia Bockoven
Jasmine Cresswell†	Evan Maxwell
Maggie Osborne†	William Bernhardt
Marianne Shock†	Victoria Thompson
† Founder	Steven Womack
	Julie Kistler

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

### 2000 Board of Directors

#### PRESIDENT Carla Neggers

P.O. Box 826  
99 Deer Path Lane  
Quechee VT 05059  
Ph 802-295-1193  
Fax 802-295-8795  
CNeggers@vermontel.com

#### PRESIDENT-ELECT Barbara Keiler

32 Atkinson Lane  
Sudbury MA 01776-1939  
Ph 978-443-0770  
Fax 978-443-0775  
E-mail: B.KEILER@juno.com

#### SECRETARY Jane Bonander

2548 Sumac Circle  
White Bear Lake MN 55110  
Ph 651-704-9010  
Fax 651-704-9011  
E-mail: JBONANDER@aol.com

#### TREASURER Debbie Gordon

1240 Noonan Drive  
Sacramento CA 95822-2507  
Ph 916-448-1964  
E-mail: DBHGORDON@aol.com

#### NEWSLETTER EDITOR Terey daly Ramin

2376 Musson Road  
Howell MI 48843-9082  
Ph 517-545-8946  
Fax 810-821-7070  
E-mail: terey@ismi.net

#### ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE

Georgia Bockoven  
3324 Zircon Dr.  
Rocklin CA 95677-4725  
Ph 916-624-7333  
Fax 916-630-1145  
E-mail: GBOCKOVEN@JPS.NET

#### CENTRAL COORDINATOR David L. Brooks

Novelists, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1166  
Mission KS 66222-0166  
E-mail: davidlbrooks@earthlink.net

Web site: <http://www.ninc.com>

Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

Copyright ©2000 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission.

## .....THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE

As I write this, it's March 1, and here in Vermont, the snow pack is melting and there's no sign of crocuses. None. I expect more snowstorms before I sit down on April 1 to write my May column. And still no sign of crocuses. Today, however, I'm struck that I've been at this job for two months...and it seems like ten. In a good way. In just these few short weeks, we've gotten the ball rolling on some very good stuff. Let me give you a "sneak peek" of what your board and committees are up to.

**Advocacy:** Chaired by Kay Hooper, the Advocacy Committee is putting together a FAQ to put on the ninc.com website and make available to members. They're addressing a wide range of issues, including plagiarism and the sale of ARCs. This isn't as easy a project as it might sound at first blush—they're digging into a number of complicated subjects. Committee members are: Kay Hooper (Chairman), Debra Dixon, Maureen Caudill, Fran Baker, Denise Domning, LaRee Bryant, Kasey Michaels, Sally Hawkes, Brenda Hiatt Barber, Vicki Hinze, Leslie LaFoy and Phyllis Warady. As you can see, an impressive group. If anyone has a "frequently asked question" they'd like the Advocacy Committee to look into, get in touch with any member.

**Internet:** After serving as president last year, who'd have thought Julie Kistler would have anything left to give to NINC? She is, truly, an amazing woman. As chairman of the Internet Committee, Julie is expanding our www.ninc.com website. If you haven't signed up for the Members Only pages, now's the time—check out the new online agents' guide. We don't rate or recommend agents. Instead, we let you know what authors have a particular agent and are willing to have you contact them. This is still new. If you see a mistake, or if you or your agent aren't listed, let Julie know. And look for more good info coming all the time. Conference updates, registration materials, articles...and an expanded agent-editor database. Julie tells me she couldn't do this job without the help of her committee, Patricia de la Fuentes and Brenda Hiatt Barber.

**Outreach:** Janice Brooks has launched a major outreach campaign. With the help of NINC's mystery members, she's put together an e-mail letter to go out to mystery writers, urging them to take a look at NINC's website and consider joining. This will be followed by efforts to reach science fiction, fantasy, romance, and mainstream multipublished authors of popular fiction. We want the writing community to know that NINC welcomes new blood, new ideas...new members. We all can help by urging our writer friends to take a fresh look at NINC and please, consider joining.

**Membership Retention:** Diane Chamberlain again took on the task of getting in touch with members in danger of not renewing in time to make the printing deadline for the 2000 Membership Roster. Her job wasn't made any easier this year after we tried putting the dues renewal form in the newsletter (it seemed like a good idea at the time) and then forgot to include the forms in the January reminder mailing (mea culpa). We'll do better on the details in 2001. Promise. Meanwhile, Diane did a great job. Many thanks.

**Nominating Committee:** Interested in doing something next year? Let us know. The Nominating Committee is always looking for people who want

to get involved. Take a look at your schedule, think about what you like to do, what you might find fun and stimulating—and let us know. For myself, there were years I knew I couldn't take on one thing more, e.g., when each of my children was in kindergarten. Of course, in 1998, we moved twice, and when the Nominating Committee called, I was packing boxes...and I said yes anyway. I'm so glad I did. I enjoy the people, the work, the ideas. So please, think about what interests you, and take it from there.

**Conference Committee:** By now, I hope you've put Vancouver 2000 on your calendar or at least can't resist Zita Christian's entertaining conference columns. The final brochure will be in the mail in June, but in the meantime, you can keep up-to-date by visiting the [ninc.com](http://ninc.com) website. And you can even register early!

**NINK:** Okay, it's not a committee, but our monthly newsletter remains one of the major reasons as authors we join NINC and renew our membership year after year. This is truly our newsletter. If you want to see a topic covered, suggest an article. Write an article. Talk your friends into writing an article. Editor Terey daly Ramin is not only one of the most efficient people I've ever worked with, but also one of the most pleasant—especially to be so efficient! Let her know what's on your mind. *[Ed's note: Yes, please do! I'm nosy and really, really like knowing. :-> Not to mention it's the only way NINK can address your concerns.]*

**The Board of Directors:** In addition to overseeing committee work, the board is working with Jo-Ann Power on a Special Project to hone NINC's vision and image and set us up for a new millennium and an exciting future. Where

do you see NINC in the next year, five years, ten years? Let us know. I'll have more on this fun and necessary work in the coming months. Other board activities—we're sending one person, probably me, to an Authors' Group Summit on April 15 in New York. Sponsored by Romance Writers of America, the summit is open to various writers groups, with the purpose of exchanging information and ideas and setting an agenda for goals we'd like to accomplish. We'll report back.

**Deb Gordon, our treasurer,** has the final paperwork done in order for NINC to take credit cards. Many, many thanks to her and Advisory Council member Marianne Shock for taking on this daunting task—I know I love to use my credit card and get my frequent flyer points! And, of course, a writer's cash flow isn't always what we'd like it to be...

**So. As you can see, we've already bitten off a lot** this year. And I haven't even gotten to what Barbara Keiler, President Elect, is up to in planning for Philadelphia 2001 and beyond. As Advisory Council Representative, Georgia Bockoven has already tapped into the collective wisdom of our foremothers and forefathers on the Advisory Council, much to the gratitude of the rest of the board. Finally, Jane Bonander...well, can you imagine taking minutes of a conference call meeting of six active, committed board members? My hat's off to her.

A final reminder: Please talk to us. Let us know what's on your mind.

— **Carla Neggers**

---

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



### Curmudgeon Cheers

May I express my undying gratitude to the person who coerced Resnick into easing our pain over the loss of Evan's column. Laura, you crack me up! I can hardly wait for the next installment.

— **Vicki Lewis Thompson**

### Plagiarism Stance Lauded

*Bravo*, Nora Roberts, for having the strength of your convictions, the intestinal fortitude to publicly stand your ground, and the courage to speak a truth that none of us can afford, either morally or professionally, to ignore.

Plagiarism is an act of moral bankruptcy. There is no valid excuse

for the theft of material from another author — under any circumstances!

Plagiarism should never be tolerated by publishers, readers, booksellers, colleagues, or organizations like NINC. It is incumbent upon the membership of NINC to support a vocal organizational policy against plagiarism. If we fail to go on record, we fail ourselves. If we fail to go on record now, we fail to honor one of the purposes for which NINC was founded.

— **Laura Taylor**

Charter Member and Former  
Member of the NINC Board of Directors

### Roberts's Stand Praised

Nora Roberts is 101% right. I said so two years ago, and I say it now. Janet Dailey was wrong, and while I am aware of her situation, it was still no excuse for what she did. I know Janet has been in this business a long time. So has Nora, and Nora has worked her butt off in my humble opinion to get where she is today, even if I do get a bit pea green with envy when I see she has two or three books at one time on the bestseller lists. She deserves it. She works for it.

Janet was an icon of [the romance] genre, but that was no excuse for violating someone else's copyrights. This personal and public

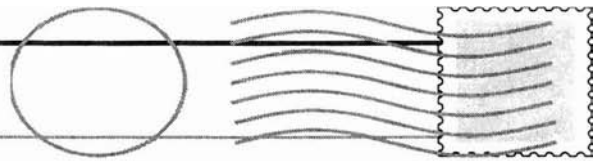
▶ ▶ ▶ ▶



---

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

---



▶ ▶ ▶

opinion will not make me beloved among some of my peers. Too bad. I know both of these women, and I like them, but that does not negate the wrong done to one by the other.

Several years ago another author whom I both knew and liked, and who is now deceased, allowed an “aspiring” author to write a book for her because she was too busy to fulfill her contractual obligations. The “aspiring” copied word for word, and line for line, changing only the names of the major characters, Jan Westcott’s *The Hepburn*, a 1950s historical. Immediately after the book was published, *Romantic Times* [a romance fanzine] began getting calls from readers. I was called, found a copy of the book at the local A&P and had read only one page when I identified the book. To be certain, I got out my own dog-eared copy of *The Hepburn*, and went over the new book line for line. They were identical.

The author whose name was on the book cried she wasn’t responsible because she had farmed her work out. I said she was most certainly responsible because her contract

— all our contracts — say that the work we deliver is ours, and is original. Her book was neither, so she not only violated her own contract, but Mrs. Westcott’s copyright. A number of her other published friends castigated me for my opinion. Again, too bad.

I had only recently gone through a similar situation with a new author who had copied line for line from two of my books. Like Nora, I pursued the matter although my situation wasn’t high profile as the other author wasn’t anyone you would know. Still, it was the principle of the matter. I work hard, and having some other author use my work really frosts me, particularly when she wrote me a letter of “apology” telling me “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery...” Yeah. Right. So, Nora honey, you go girl! This old queen of the [romance] genre fully approves of your ethics. And so should every member of NINC.

— **Bertrice Small**

---

## Before Vancouver Calls, There’s Seattle

The Northwest Bookfest will be held in Seattle on October 21-22, just a few days before the NINC conference in Vancouver. Kate Dooley, our conference planner, is putting together a post-Bookfest, pre-conference package for those who want to spend more time in one of the most beautiful corners of the world. Here are the highlights:

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 23:

Morning coach transfer to the pier to board the Seattle Clipper. The ship departs Seattle at 8:30 a.m. and arrives in Victoria at approximately 11 a.m. Along the way, relax and enjoy a champagne continental breakfast. In Victoria, you’ll transfer to a double-decker bus for a city tour. After the tour, check-in at the Empress Hotel, a deluxe, gracious landmark property, dating from 1908. In the afternoon, tour the 50-acre, world famous Butchart Gardens. That evening, have dinner with the group at an area restaurant.

### TUESDAY, OCTOBER 24:

Buffet breakfast at the Empress Hotel, then off for a private group tour of Craigdarroch Castle. In the afternoon, enjoy high tea at the Empress and feel oh-so-uppercrust.

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25:

Morning coach transfer to the pier. While on board the ferry to Vancouver, enjoy a buffet breakfast. Once in

Vancouver, a coach will transfer you to the Waterfront Centre Hotel, site of the NINC conference. The conference doesn’t begin until Thursday, so you can spend the day sightseeing or shopping.

### COST:

Kate is working out the details now. She estimates the cost at approximately \$400 per person. For more information, contact Kate at Mountain State Travel: (800) 344-6602 or e-mail her at [ninc2000conf@yahoo.com](mailto:ninc2000conf@yahoo.com).

### BOOKFEST:

Anyone can attend the Bookfest. If you’re interested in participating, check the website: [www.nwbookfest.org](http://www.nwbookfest.org) or contact Carla Neggers.

### AND MORE BOOK EVENTS:

Get in touch with NINC member and Vancouver-area resident Judith Bowen at [judith@JUDITHBOWEN.COM](mailto:judith@JUDITHBOWEN.COM) for more information on participating in the Vancouver International Writers’ Festival and the Surrey Writers’ Conference, both being held in Vancouver around the time of the NINC conference.

— **Zita Christian**

# Taking the Pulse of Historical Mysteries

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 1

Clynes/P.C. Doherty/C.L. Grace/Paul Harding, two Elizabethan series, by Edward Marston and Leonard Tourney, and no less than three series set in Ancient Rome.

Personally, I'd like to believe the buzz—that this is a new “hot” market; that it's still growing; that it makes good financial sense to switch from the allegedly shrinking historical romance market to writing historical mysteries. But is the buzz true? Can you make a living in this field?

Vicki/Victoria Thompson [*Murder on Astor Place*, A Gaslight Mystery] is right about *The Alienist*. It called attention to the genre and opened up opportunities for more historical mysteries set in the nineteenth century on the U.S. East Coast. Earlier, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* did something similar for medieval mysteries. Funny thing, though—neither of these big, single-title, bestselling books is typical of the historical mystery genre. Nor are they what publishers will buy for their mystery imprints.

Most historical mysteries are much shorter [70,000-100,000 words]. Most new historical mysteries are bought as the first book in a projected series. (Yes, *The Alienist* had a sequel, but the first book was not written as book one of a series.) These generalizations apply to paperback originals and hard/soft deals as well as to contracts for hardcover only. The latter is still the most common way to get into print in the mystery genre and for those who go that route, a paperback reprint sale is by no means guaranteed. Hardcover print runs average around 4000 copies and few go into second printings.

My own situation with the Face Down series is, I think, fairly typical. The paperback sale to another house for the first three books came only after I'd sold the fourth book to my hardcover publisher. I know of one series that is up

to eight books in hardcover and still has no paperback deal in sight. In the other direction, although a few contemporary series have started out as paperback originals and gone into hardcover on later books, to the best of my knowledge there is no historical mystery series that has done so, other than in a Mystery Guild edition.

At least 20 new historical mystery series made their first appearance during 1998 and 1999. I expect there were quite a few more, but those are the ones I can name. The majority were written by veterans of the mystery genre. Most will last at least two books, since most mystery publishers offer two- or three-book contracts to establish a series. Many will die out quickly after that. With one book per year per series standard (with one or two exceptions among paperback originals, publishers simply do not want more than that) few series are ever likely to equal the twenty “chronicles” featuring Ellis Peters's Cadfael.

What's “new” in historical mystery? What's “hot?” As in every other area of publishing, by the time anyone notices, it's probably already too late to jump on that bandwagon. One apparent trend, however, appears to be a setting somewhere in the first few decades of the 20th century. Jill Churchill's *Anything Goes*, *A Grave and Favor Mystery*, for example, is set in 1939. As a setting, this period is shared by non-historicals written as contemporaries by mystery greats like Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers. It is too early yet to say if fans of these classics will be drawn to the new historicals. Certainly a prior familiarity with Sherlock Holmes did nothing but help the popularity of books by Anne Perry and Elizabeth Peters and Laurie King's series, featuring a young American as Holmes's fictional wife [*The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, 1994] has been equally successful.

Series featuring real people as

sleuths also seem to be proliferating. Elizabeth I [Karen Harper, *The Poyson Garden*] and Harry Houdini and his brother [Daniel Stashower, *The Dime Museum Murders*] have joined the likes of Mark Twain and Jane Austen. Another trend? With few historical periods left unclaimed, there's no doubt that it is the sleuth's unique personality that makes one series stand out from the rest.

Readers of historical mysteries are loyal and enthusiastic and willing to buy in hardcover, and they are as particular as editors about what they want to read. They want good plots and a solid mystery to solve, but they also demand interesting characters and a setting so vividly portrayed that they can feel they are living in that time right along with the characters. Generally speaking, they don't mind the addition of humor and/or romance to the story, though they aren't too enthusiastic about graphic sex scenes. For that matter, they don't particularly want graphic violence, either. On the other hand, they'll tolerate far more gritty realism than is found in the typical historical romance, and they don't mind large numbers of characters at all. They do expect historical accuracy and will tell you about it if they feel you've gotten something wrong.

The greatest concentration of historical mystery readers is found in the Historical Mystery Appreciation Society [<http://themysterybox.com/hmas>]. Last year they presented their first awards [called the Herodotus] to the best historical mysteries of 1998. Best U.S. Historical Mystery went to Sharan Newman's *Cursed in the Blood*. Best International Historical Mystery went to *Ex-Libris* by Ross King. Best First U.S. Historical Mystery went to *Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* by Richard Zimler.

If you're scratching your head and wondering why you've never heard of any of them, you're not alone. Historical mysteries don't make bestseller lists very often. They don't even win many of the major mystery



## BREAKING NEWS

**That Editor thing...** Maggie Crawford has left Dell to go to Warner Books as Executive Editor of Mass Market.

**This film agent tidbit** from the Internet Movie Database: A month after firing the six agents at its London office, the William Morris Agency announced it will set up a new overseas unit called WMA/IFG (for "international film group"). This section of the agency is aimed at placing talent that WMA represents in European productions as well as helping to find financing for independent films shot abroad. Veteran WMA agents Hylda Queally and Cassian Elwes were named to head the new unit.

**From SFWA:** "For the first time, the members of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America are endeavoring to turn the Nebula Awards Weekend into an event so large that even New York City can't contain it. And we need book stores!

"Authors Sarah Zettel and Steven Piziks, with the blessing of SFWA president Paul Levinson, have volunteered to try to coordinate a grass-roots effort to set up group signings in other locations across the U.S. on Nebula Awards Weekend (May 19-21). These events are envisioned as an opportunity to promote the Nebulas, science fiction, and independent bookstores around the country. We're trying to match as many bookstores with science fiction and fantasy writers as possible.

For those unfamiliar with them, the Nebula Awards are the Oscars of science fiction and fantasy. Like the Screen Actors Guild, the members of SFWA vote on the best sf and fantasy published in the

## Historical Mysteries

►►► awards.

In 1999 there was a conference, Historicon II, specifically for fans of the historical mystery. In spite of the II, it is not an annual conference. In fact, #II is probably the last. It was very, very small. This is a very small sub-genre. It will always be a sub-genre. Most of the titles that comprise it will remain midlist titles. I don't mean to sound pessimistic. I'm certainly not discouraged by the way my own career is going.

The pulse of historical mysteries is strong. The genre is alive and well. It is probably still growing. I certainly hope so, since I'm trying to sell a second series set in a different historical period. But it is not now and probably never will be the way to the bestseller lists.

Can you achieve fame and fortune by writing historical mysteries? To a moderate degree, perhaps, if you're very lucky and have your publisher behind you. Can you make a living at it? Maybe, but usually not until your series has been around for a while. Breakout books are rare.

Personally, I'm doing better at this than I was writing single title historical romance, but I was not particularly good at writing single title historical romance. In my case, historical mystery is simply the genre I belong in, the place where my strengths and interests mesh with what editors and readers want. I'm never going to hit any bestseller lists. I'll be surprised if I ever win any awards. But I love what I'm doing.

If you're thinking about writing historical mysteries, that's my advice to you—do it first because you love the genre.

*Each title in brackets is the first book in that author's series. Kathy Lynn Emerson's first, Face Down in the Marrow-Bone Pie, is due out in paperback in April. Her most recent hardcover is Face Down Beneath the Eleanor Cross.*



## BREAKING NEWS

previous year and give awards to winners in the categories of short story, novella, novelette, novel, and screenplay. This year's Nebula Awards will be held on Saturday, May 20 in New York City.

"So far, we have Nebula Award Weekend signings scheduled at independent bookstores in Oregon, Washington, Michigan, Texas, Minnesota, Indiana, Illinois, and Florida. Although we need more bookstores from everywhere, including the states already listed, we're especially looking for independents from California, Arizona, and the Dallas area. (Several authors in these areas have expressed interest, but we don't have bookstores for them yet.)

"The signings would be on Friday, May 19 or Saturday, May 20. If you know of or own a bookstore that would be interested, please contact me, Steven Piziks, at [pizikss@walledlake.k12.mi.us](mailto:pizikss@walledlake.k12.mi.us) as soon as possible. Thank you."

-- Steven Piziks

**An Announcement** and an opportunity from Nancy Aikman Martin, President NovelsNow.com, Inc, 161 Timbersprings, Indiana, PA 15701; phone 724-349-4863; email [nmartin@novelsnow.com](mailto:nmartin@novelsnow.com): On March 10, 2000, NovelsNow.com, Inc announces the opening of a virtual consignment shop for published authors who want to sell their previously published books online. NovelsNow.com will distribute women's fiction on the Internet, which buyers can download for \$3.00 and read on a computer, pocket pc or dedicated e-book device. "Nobody knows whether consumers are ready to buy digital books yet," says Nancy Martin, President of NovelsNow.com and an author herself. "But I believe if

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 1

extended-family cookout on the Fourth and saying nothing. The fireworks we watched that night were nothing compared to the ones going off in my head every time I thought about the offer.

After the longest weekend of my life, Monday finally arrived. I tried to work, stared at the phone, and cursed the time difference between California and the rest of the country. But finally the phone rang. Not only had Hallmark made an offer, so had Scripps-Howard, and another production company was preparing their own bid. Over the next few days, I got a crash course in options and pay-outs, and by Wednesday, the deal was done. We'd accepted Hallmark's offer. My book was officially optioned.

I had great fun telling everyone about it, and listening to their automatic response. "Hallmark Hall of Fame? I love their movies!" Everyone wanted to know every little detail—when would the movie air, who would play the hero and heroine, where would it be filmed. Unfortunately, excitement I had a lot of. Details I was short on.

Somebody once described baseball as moments of great excitement followed by long periods of boredom. (I'm not a sports fan, so if I've mangled the line, forgive me, but you get the picture.) That became my life. For months I was asked the same question by literally everyone I knew: have you heard anything about the movie? And for months the answer was the same: nope, not a word. Then the contract came. That got me through a few months' worth of questions. Then the option money arrived, good for another few months.

The contract, by the way, was shorter than most publishing contracts I've signed, and dealt with pretty standard issues. There was one clause I got a kick out of, though, that stated that any advertising paid for by

Hallmark and including the screenwriter's name must also include my name, and specified that the size of type used for my name "shall not be smaller" than the size of type used for the screenwriter's name. It's an ego thing, I guess, but it struck me as too funny.

Then came month after month with no news. Some people, I think, began to doubt me. Those who'd hoped for a quick airdate—my mom would have been happy with Christmas '97—started saying with some disappointment, "Well, maybe next year." Or maybe the year after that, I'd gently remind them, or even the year after that. After all, this was Hollywood. They didn't work quickly.

Or maybe—oh, please, don't let this be the case—not at all. Every soul who knew the dismal rate of books optioned compared to books whose movies were actually made (five to ten percent actually get filmed, or so I was told) felt compelled to inform me just how much the odds were against me.

Not that I minded. Honestly. I was the one who was thrilled that a film agent liked her book, remember?

You know how our luck runs sometimes? You get some fabulous news—you've sold your first book, made your first bestseller list, won your first award—and you can't find anyone to share it with? That was how the next step happened for me.

It was December '98, a few days before Christmas. My husband was running errands, my soldier son was out in the field training, my mom was out of the office, and my best friends were all away from home, all without their cell phones. Of course that was when I got the word from Andrea's office: Hallmark had exercised their option. They'd bought the project outright, which was a virtual guarantee that the movie would be made, and the check was in the mail.

In twelve years in the business, I'd never seen a check clear so many desks so quickly. Everyone, from Hallmark to the film agent to my own agency, wanted the money out of their accounts before the end of the year, which meant putting it in ▶ ▶ ▶



## BREAKING NEWS



anyone's ready, it's readers of romance novels and women's fiction. Unlike other websites that are under construction right now, NovelsNow.com focuses on an established readership who are already highly networked and hungry for books." NovelsNow.com primarily seeks books of 65,000 words or less, especially romantic suspense, mystery and "hip, fast-paced stories" suitable for a new readership of young, computer-savvy women. Rights to the books must have reverted to the authors, and NovelsNow.com offers authors 50% of the retail price of the books. "We hope our authors will link their personal websites to NovelsNow.com," says Martin, "to help build the readership for everyone." NovelsNow.com will launch in preview mode in April, 2000. Authors who are interested in placing their books in the virtual consignment shop, should use nmartin@NovelsNow.com to contact Martin for further information.

According to an article at the Internet Movie Database (indb.com) Hollywood mogul David Geffen has privately complained to executives of media giant Bertelsmann and its Random House publishing subsidiary about the new book about him. *The Operator: David Geffen Builds, Buys and Sells the New Hollywood* by Wall Street Journal writer Tom King, depicts Geffen as a ruthless figure in both personal and financial dealings. Random House spokesman Stuart Applebaum told the A.P., "We keep hearing from Geffen that the book is filled with inaccuracies, but we're still waiting for a single citation to that ▶ ▶ ▶

► ► ►

my account. I have to tell you, though, it was fun, walking into my bank, presenting the check, and saying, "I'd like this in tens and twenties, please." Business literally came to a halt in the bank while I filled everyone in on the great news. Even the prospect of paying the IRS couldn't dampen my excitement.

But then it was back to the waiting. When we accepted Hallmark's offer, Andrea warned me that they were very close-mouthed about their projects. Boy, was that true. Over the next nine months, we heard only one little tidbit from them—that they were researching the book's title.

Then, one Thursday evening early in September, I went to get my hair done. Any news about the movie? my stylist asked for the umpteenth time. Not a word, I replied for the millionth time. I went home, did the usual nighttime stuff, then sat down to read a bit before bed. My reading material—no heavy-duty bedtime reading for me—was the Fall Preview issue of *TV Guide*. I thumbed through page after page before finally coming to the made-for-TV movie listings. One of these days, I thought with a great sigh, I'm going to look in here and see *my* movie listed.

With absolutely no expectations whatsoever, I turned to page 92 and started reading: "A Season for Miracles." CBS, December 12. From Hallmark Hall of Fame." Honestly, my first thought was, "Oh, that's my mom's birthday," and my second was a twinge of disappointment that, darn, Hallmark already had their Christmas movie for this year, so maybe next year...

Then it sank in. "A Season for Miracles." That was—well, except for the A—*my* title. And the story synopsis... that was *my* story. Hands shaking, I went to the bedroom, where my husband was engaged in his usual evening activity—surfing the Net—and asked, What do you think of Laura Dern?

She's a good actress, he replied.

What about Patty Duke? Of course, he liked her, too. And Lynn Redgrave? Puzzled, he looked from me to the *TV Guide* and his eyes opened wide. "Is there something in there?" he demanded.

Yes, that was how I found out my movie had been made. (Did I ever mention that when I sold my first book, I got "the call" . . . from my mother?)

For the next few months, Hallmark tantalized us with tidbits—the promotional poster was fabulous, the press kit was great, the final version of the movie would be ready any day now and everyone in-house loved it so much they were considering making it their annual Christmas event. But we only got to *hear* these things. It was weeks before we got a copy of the press kit, before I held a promotional video of the movie in my nervous little hands.

I got the video the Saturday after Thanksgiving and, no kidding, nearly cried. I hurried home from the post office, slipped it into the VCR, and prepared for the moment of truth. What if I hated it? What if the book's message had gotten totally lost? What if the stars, Carla Gugino and David Conrad, couldn't begin to bring life to the characters who'd lived in my head for three years?

With some apprehension, I pressed the Play button, and as the video played, my worries all disappeared. I loved the movie. *Loved* it. Was convinced it was the first movie I'd ever seen that truly was better than the book.

From that moment on, things got a little hectic. The phone began ringing, with requests from area newspapers and the local CBS affiliate for interviews. Commercials for the movie began running. Mentions of it began popping up—*TV Guide's* Holiday Guide issue gave it three-quarters of a page and mentioned me, too! Print ads began showing up, as well as reviews. (Like worrying about book reviews wasn't enough?)

With all the excitement, who could write? And a FedEx delivery from my agent bright one Tuesday morning doubled the excitement: it contained an invitation to the premiere. A Hollywood premiere for my movie! I was too thrilled for words—and too anxious. I'm a relatively shy person. You won't see me at many conferences because it's tough for me to get out among strangers. I need someone to hold on to—tightly. Me, hobnobbing with Hollywood types? Huh-uh. No way. I got a stomachache just thinking about it.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime chance, Bob insisted. Even if I saw the next 20 books made into films, there would never be another premiere for *this* book again. Of course we were going.

Besides, he added, didn't I joke that I needed an all-expense-paid vacation? And Hallmark was dangling one in front of me. All I had to do was accept.

So I did, after making certain my best friend Dale and her husband could drop everything and meet us there. (Someone to hold on to tightly, remember?) Many thanks to Bob for convincing me, and to Dale and Ed for sharing it with me, because it was truly the most dazzling time of my life.

We flew to LA a day early, where we were put up at a lovely hotel in West Hollywood. We enjoyed the fabulous California weather, went shopping, wandered up and down Rodeo Drive, and had lunch a few tables away from Catherine Zeta-Jones. Finally, my 20-year-old son was impressed with me!

Wednesday night it was time for the screening. It was held at the Directors Guild of America Theater on Sunset Boulevard. Because of work and holiday schedules, not many of the cast members were able to be there, but Carla Gugino was there and was perfectly gracious. Mae Whitman and Evan Sabara, who played the kids, were adorable. And Patty Duke . . . My, oh, my, this small-town



Oklahoma girl who grew up watching Patty Duke on television not only got to meet her, but got a hug from her, along with a warm thanks for writing the book in the first place. There were plenty of other actors in attendance, but Patty was definitely the star.

Meeting the people behind the making of the movie was a big thrill, too. I spent much of the evening with Richard Welsh, the executive producer who's overseen all Hallmark Hall of Fame films for the last twelve years. It was great fun hearing his side of how he came to choose my book. "A Season for Miracles" was Hallmark's first Christmas production in more than 20 years. Dick had been approached repeatedly about doing a Christmas story, but he'd always refused. They're all the same, he insisted. There's nothing new or different out there.

When the film agent told him he had a Christmas book for him to look at, he headed off the inevitable turn-down by saying, I know you don't want to do a Christmas movie because they're all the same, but just give it a look. Dick agreed, read the book, and called the head of Hall of Fame Productions to tell him that he was buying a Christmas story. The boss laughed and said yeah, right. Everyone knows you won't do a Christmas story because they're all the same.

Not this one, Dick replied. This one's different, and I'm buying it.

I also met Michael Pressman, the director ("Picket Fences" and "Chicago Hope"). I got a kick out of listening to him discuss reviews. Well, *Variety* hated it, but they hate everything sentimental and nobody outside Hollywood cares what they think anyway, but *these* reviewers loved it and obviously got it. (Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Maybe we're not so different after all.)

Before the screening, I was introduced to a fellow Okie by the name of Brad. Nice guy—funny, entertaining, *real*. I liked him a lot and figured he was one of Hallmark's Kansas City people (there were a lot of them there). When the lights flashed,

we went into the theater and found seats, and a voice came over the public address system to introduce the president of Hallmark Hall of Fame, Brad Moore. My totally nice, everyday average Okie was the big kahuna! I was too impressed for words. And one of the first things he did was introduce "a very special guest who made this entire event possible." (As nervous and excited and starstruck as I was, I have a few lines from that night on my mental tape recorder, to relive at will.) To be so described, and to have more than five hundred Hollywood types applauding *me*...

What can I say? It was a Hallmark moment.

*Marilyn Pappano is the author of more than 40 books for Bantam, Silhouette and Warner. She's tickled beyond words to report that "A Season for Miracles" was seen by some 22.2 million viewers and ranks fourth among all television movies in the 1999-2000 season.*

---

## INTRODUCING.....

---

*The following authors have applied for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this NINC issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:*

### New Applicants

Karen Sandler, Cameron Park CA  
Jan Scarbrough, Louisville KY

### New Members

Valerie Taylor, Cincinnati OH  
Mallory Dorn Hart, New York NY  
Carolyn Aarsen, Neerlandia  
Alberta, Canada  
Grace Green, West Vancouver,  
BC, Canada

We've room for more!  
Remember, recruiting is a community effort you can share.

---



## BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ effect."

**From PW daily...**The Upper Midwest Booksellers Association has held a forum for publisher members to provide information about the region and engage in a discussion about relations between store representatives and publishers. UMBA is encouraging a variety of publishing people to attend, including customer service, credit, telephone sales and warehouse managers as well as sales, marketing, promotion and publicity personnel. We'll stay tuned for further updates.

**The Literary Guild** has agreed to a partnership with the Book-of-the-Month Club. This unites America's two biggest book clubs with more than eight million customers. The clubs finalized their plans in March after merger plans were announced in December. The deal involves no exchange of money or shares and is as yet unnamed. Bertelsmann's Doubleday direct will reportedly manage it along with the Literary Guild and the 35 or so other clubs it already operates.

**In closing...**This one from the I'm-sorry-but-I-couldn't-resist-it-department <g>: According to the March 12 *Detroit Free Press*, Danielle Steel has said no to a marriage proposal from George Hamilton because he returned her Christmas present to a department store for cash. The other reason she said no is that she's had so many marriages and so many divorces she just doesn't want another. [Ed's note: *That one I'll buy!*]

**Be sure to share Breaking News with our new columnist, Pam Browning (write2pam@aol.com)**



# **VANCOUVER CALLS:**

## ***The Market, the Media, the Muse***

### ***Part 1: The Muse, a/k/a the Touchy-Feely Stuff***

#### **"Where do you get your ideas?"**

We've all been asked that question. We've all responded with varying degrees of politeness and frustration. It occurred to me that you might be reading your preliminary conference brochure and asking that question of me. I said the conference would focus on "the market, the media, the muse." You might expect "the market" to deal with online sales and reviews, electronic publishing and its implications for a writer's backlist, the blurring distinction between literary and popular fiction. You'd be right. You might expect "the media" to deal with tips on how to control an interview, how to dress for television, which books make the best movies, and the cry in Hollywood for writers who know how to tell a story. Again, you'd be right. "But what about the muse?" you ask. "What is that all about? It sounds so...so touchy-feely."

Fear not. I guarantee you an adventure to remember—with pleasure. But first, back to the question of where I get my ideas, or at least this one idea.

I work at a performing arts theatre. Musicals, operas, ballets, concerts from symphony to salsa to soul are regular fare. Everyone expects the performers to be creative. No one expects the staff to be creative. Or so I thought.

Early this past October, my boss sent out a memo to all 40+ staff announcing a meeting to be held at the end of the month. The meeting would focus on creativity. Attendance would be mandatory.

A few excuses trickled in that first week. One person had a meeting to attend; another, a deadline to meet. No excuses accepted. Mid-month, word got around that during the upcoming mandatory, four-hour meeting, we would be required to play. To play? The excuses poured in. More meetings to attend. More deadlines to meet. Fundraising calls that couldn't wait. Piles of dust-covered documents that simply, absolutely, positively had to be filed. No excuses accepted.

Finally, the day came. Mumbling and grumbling, whispering, giggling, we climbed the marble stairs and cautiously entered the grand room used during intermissions. Heavy drapes bordered the floor-to-ceiling windows. Dark, rich paneling, ornately carved and gleaming with polish, boxed us in. At one end of the room, a formal portrait of the theatre's namesake hung above a massive fireplace. At the other end of the room, a baby grand piano sat on the small, raised stage normally used for chamber music. On the left, two long bars held orange juice, coffee, bagels, and danish. On the right, the doors to the mezzanine stood sentinel. A large Oriental rug anchored it all. Now, in the middle of the room stretched eight long tables, each numbered, each covered by brown wrapping paper. A gatekeeper met us at the door and handed out

placecards. We were to work in teams, with people not of our own choosing. One person checked his watch; another looked back toward the door, now shut. A few others squealed with delight.

Scattered on each table lay an assortment of items: feathers, buttons, beads, construction paper, ribbons, glitter, cardboard tubes, paint, florescent markers, raffia, spoons, triangles, gourds, tambourines, drums, and banjos. At the head of the room stood an easel, next to it a boom box. I won't tell you exactly what happened, except that it involved teamwork, competition, a lecture on Picasso, another on bebop. I will tell you that when the four hours ended, no one wanted to leave.

Six months later people still talk about the day. They speak with both joy and a kind of wistfulness. Art that some might consider crude adorns the community mailbox. We look at coworkers with new eyes. The few who called in sick that day know the meaning of regret. Several weeks ago, we held the event again, on a smaller scale, for a group of 20 doctors and their spouses. Same reaction.

The experience showed me new routes to the cave where my own creativity dwells. It taught me to recognize tools where I once saw junk, to pull possibility from chaos, to seize moments of inspiration and stretch them into hours. It reacquainted me with my muse. It freed me to make magic.

When you come to Vancouver, you will be offered the same experience. Are you already making excuses? Or are you preparing to reach for that registration form when it arrives in the May *NINK*?

**Next month, look for information** about our banquet speaker, Jan Phillips, who left the convent to become an award-winning photographer, writer, and lecturer. She could have become a stand-up comic. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Utne Reader*, and many other publications. Her book *Marry Your Muse: Making a Lasting Commitment to Your Creativity* speaks to writers on a personal, inspiring, gutsy level. Her new book, *God is at Eye Level: Photography as a Healing Art*, will serve as the basis for a very special 90-minute workshop.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you'll find information from our conference planner, Kate Dooley, about exciting events that precede the conference. NINC is pulling out all the stops to make Vancouver 2000 the publishing event of the year. The registration form will be in the May newsletter, and it's on the website now. We do accept Visa and Mastercard. You can also get in touch with Judith Bowen at [judith@JUDITHBOWEN.COM](mailto:judith@JUDITHBOWEN.COM) for information about the Vancouver International Writers' Festival and the Surrey Writers' Conference, both being held in Vancouver around the time of the NINC conference.

— **Zita Christian**

Recently my favorite bookstore closed. It had a convenient location, offered a discount, and I knew how all the books were arranged. My city has other bookstores but none are as convenient as the one that closed. So just before Christmas, when everyone's list included a selection of books and I was running behind schedule, I went to Amazon.com. All but two of the books were guaranteed to be shipped within 24 hours. Since I didn't want to hold up my shipment waiting for the other two books, I selected the "do not wait for complete shipment" icon. My postage on a \$140 order was \$40. I couldn't bring myself to click the "order complete" icon. Instead, I went back and removed the two items that weren't guaranteed, clicked "ship when entire order is ready," and my \$110 order now had a postage cost of \$10. (Note: All amounts are approximate.) When I took into account the discount that Amazon was offering plus the fact that I didn't have to pay \$8.80 in taxes, I found it easier to complete the transaction. And I received the books in four days.

Since that time, I've become rather spoiled with online bookstores. I placed an order this week at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and was going to do a comparison against the same order placed at [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com), but B&N didn't have two of the books on my list so I couldn't get an accurate comparison. I was interested in seeing the difference in postage and handling rates.

While Amazon and Barnes & Noble may be the most recognizable bookstores on the Internet, they are by no means the only ones. Although many sites set themselves up as bookstores, some still actually sell the books through Amazon. The site receives a percentage of the sales for providing a link to Amazon. Authors can also receive a percentage of the sales by becoming an associate with Amazon. My RWA chapter became an associate so that if our members ordered books through our chapter website, the chapter received a commission. A small but convenient fundraiser.

## PROMOTION

Siren Books at [www.sirenbooks.com](http://www.sirenbooks.com) is an online e-zine that works in association with Amazon to offer books for sale. They have also recently set up a calendar at the site that lists the release date for single title books. They cannot list Harlequin or Silhouette because of the number of books released each month. If you would like your single title release added to their calendar, send an e-mail to [sirenbooks.com](mailto:sirenbooks.com).

You can now easily set up a bulletin board dedicated to yourself and your readers. EZ-Board at [www.ezboard.com/](http://www.ezboard.com/) offers "free, easy, and customizable message boards." You "can even seamlessly integrate" your bulletin board with your web page. There is a learning center at the site that will teach you everything you need to know to set up this free bulletin board service.

The Word Museum at [www.wordmuseum.com](http://www.wordmuseum.com) invites you to take advantage of the visitors that come to Word Museum each day. They are always happy to interview authors. For an interview, send an e-mail to [wordmuseum@wordmuseum.com](mailto:wordmuseum@wordmuseum.com).

Kelly Wong, owner and creator of FictionDB.com at [www.fictiondb.com](http://www.fictiondb.com), reports that the site is "dedicated to romance novels and authors. The heart of the site is a database listing over 45,000 romance titles and 8,000 authors. The site was launched in November and the response has been overwhelming from both readers and writers.

"Since one of the most commonly asked questions on the romance listserves involves author backlists, I hope you will see the benefit of your readers having access to a complete listing of all your titles. I would appreciate you visiting my site and verifying the information I have provided about you. I currently display the following information for each author:

*Books:* Title, Series, Number, Publication Date, Genre, Sequels

*Authors:* Pseudonyms, website, e-mail

"Please let me know what you think of the site and if you have any additions or corrections. I am particularly interested in any connections between books as I am currently developing the sequels page."

You can e-mail Kelly at [Romance@FictionDB.com](mailto:Romance@FictionDB.com).

## CONFERENCE

Laura Resnick shared this tip. If you're going to Vancouver, you might want to explore British Columbia's outdoors with a helicopter ride upstream and a three-hour rafting ride on the same river used in the 1996 Eco-Challenge. The boat holds seven, so this might be a trip to book with your closest writing friends. Prices start at US\$175. For more information, visit [expedia.com/daily/travnews/February2000/february16-00AdventureBC-Raft.asp](http://expedia.com/daily/travnews/February2000/february16-00AdventureBC-Raft.asp).

## RESEARCH

Sally Hawkes shared this tip. The University of South Carolina Beaufort Library offers "Bare Bones 101: A Basic Tutorial on Searching the Web" at [www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/agree.html](http://www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/agree.html). The quick overview of techniques can help Web users get better results from their searches.

For information on laws or government, Julie Kistler suggests Hicros Gamos at [www.hg.org/](http://www.hg.org/). An incredible amount of legal information is available at the site.

Terey offers us a site that allows you to read newspapers anywhere in the U. S. Visit US Newspapers Links at [www.microzoo.com/](http://www.microzoo.com/).

Painted Rock Writers & Readers Colony at [www.paintedrock.com](http://www.paintedrock.com) is putting up an electronic research bookstore. When it opens in the spring, writers will be able to purchase electronic copies (and some hardcopies and disks) of old books and maga- ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶



# Online.....

► ► ► ► zines. Research packets on specific topics will contain compilations of material from numerous out-of-print sources.

## AGENTS

Terey also recommends the Association of Author Representatives Canon of Ethics at [www.aar-online.org](http://www.aar-online.org)

## SPAM MAIL TIP

As most of you know, when you browse the Internet, you are likely to be bombarded with unwanted porn solicitations and other spam mail. Victoria Thompson's husband likes to surf the Internet but dislikes all the spam mail. "He created a separate identity (on AOL you can have up to five screen names) which he uses to surf the net and which is set on 'No mail,' so spam doesn't get

through." A clever idea.

## BUSINESS

If you've never been comfortable offering a critique or just need a refresher on the best approach, there is an excellent article written by children's writer Suzanne Lieurance. The Guide to Critiquing Manuscripts can be found at [www.wordmuseum.com/childrencolumn](http://www.wordmuseum.com/childrencolumn).

The way of the future seems to be going toward Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) for connecting to the Internet. The disadvantage to this system is

that it allows hackers to access your computer. For information on firewall products, visit [www.usatoday.com/hear.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/hear.htm), [www.symantec.com/](http://www.symantec.com/), and [www.zonelabs.com/](http://www.zonelabs.com/).

I'd like to thank Terey for being so generous in sharing useful sites.

If you have sites to share that you think would be of interest to Novelists, Inc. members, please e-mail me.

— **Lorraine Heath**  
([LorraineHe@aol.com](mailto:LorraineHe@aol.com))

## JOINING THE LINK

If you are not subscribed to NINCLINK and wish to be, send an e-mail:

To: [LISTSERV@PEACH.EASE.LSOFT.COM](mailto: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

If you have any technical problems with the listserve, contact Patricia de la Fuente ([patricia@hiline.net](mailto:patricia@hiline.net)) as she handles the technical aspects.

# NINK Notes.....

**LOOKING FOR...**writers to do interviews and take on article assignments *for pay* (well, at least a nice honorarium). Also, if you've got an article to pitch, consider yourself invited to do so! My personal interests are many and varied, and my job here is to please all of our NINC members some of the time, so... :->

**#1 — New at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com)!** We've put together the first phases of an online e-mail roster and an Interactive Agents Guide inside the Members Only area. You'll need to sign up for a Members Only password if you haven't already, but if you forget someone's e-mail address or need to get advice from fellow members about agents, this is the place to start. We hope to hear from lots of you with additions and updates to these guides.

**And #2 — 2001, A Nominating Odyssey?** Yes, that's right—it's time for the Nominating Committee to get started. We'll be looking for candidates for president-elect, treasurer and secretary to serve on the 2001 Novelists Inc. Board of Directors, as well as a slate of nominees for next year's Nominating Committee. If you think you might be interested in one of these jobs, or if you'd like to suggest the name of a fellow member you think would make a dynamite officer or member of the Nominating Committee, you may contact any member of the current Nominating Committee. They are:

Julie Kistler ([julie@juliekistler.com](mailto:julie@juliekistler.com)), Julie Tetel Andresen ([jtetel@acpub.duke.edu](mailto:jtetel@acpub.duke.edu)), Brenda Hiatt Barber ([BrendaHB@aol.com](mailto:BrendaHB@aol.com)), Kathy Lynn Emerson ([emerson@megalink.net](mailto:emerson@megalink.net)), Amanda Scott/Lynne Drennan ([AmandaScott@worldnet.att.com](mailto:AmandaScott@worldnet.att.com)), or Barbara Samuel/Ruth Wind ([samuel@rmi.net](mailto:samuel@rmi.net)).

**From: Myrna Temte** (who may not realize I've stuck this in here, so I'm just checking to be sure she's paying attention...<g>)

### Subject: audio books

"My husband works for a small company in Spokane, Washington that produces unabridged audio books. My husband's job is selling the books to libraries (he schmoozes librarians all day long <g>) and he's also responsible for their website ([www.booksinmotion.com](http://www.booksinmotion.com)). Their other primary market involves rentals to long haul truck drivers. They have rental racks in truck stops all over the place. They don't usually pay authors much in advances, but they do pay a regular quarterly royalty on all rentals and sales. They do all kinds of popular fiction, so if you have your rights back to any of your books, you might want to contact them. Several NINC authors are already working with them. The owner is Gary Challenger at Books In Motion, (800) 752-3199 or (509) 922-1646"



# THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

## “Preaching to the Choir....”

I hesitate to broach this subject, to spend time on it, because I’ve always assumed that I would be [see headline]. And I was raised, after all, to prefer a lively argument to a lot of nodding heads... even though I do love and live for those seldom heard words, “You’re right, Laura, you’re so right.”

However, I was genuinely moved by Nora Roberts’ letter to the editor in the March *NINK*. Which stands to reason. There wouldn’t be 100,000,000 copies of Nora’s books in print (according to *Time*) if she couldn’t at least move a hothead like me. Am I right? (You’re right, Laura, you’re so right.)

The letter not only affected me, it also strongly reminded me of another letter I read several years ago—one wherein Robin Lee Hatcher talked about the resolution of the class action suit she led against Dorchester.

Nora’s letter recalling her lengthy and draining battle against a plagiarist and Robin’s letter reviewing her lengthy and draining struggle against a publisher withholding monies owed to its authors have many things in common, but what struck me most forcibly in each case was the loneliness of the long distance runner.

I always thought if you went the distance, everyone would cheer you and urge you on. (Does anyone else remember some old newsreel footage of the cheering crowd carrying an Olympic Marathon runner across the finish line when he collapsed in the home stretch and couldn’t go on?) I had no idea that so many people would abandon the runner, let alone that others would turn on her, inexplicably afraid that someone else’s doing the right thing would somehow spoil life for the rest of us. Or that, gosh, we should all try to be a little more sympathetic to the perpetrator’s point of view.

Now me, I’m a hardass chick, so my views on this sort of thing are simple: I think that plagiarism is theft and that withholding monies owed to authors is even worse.

However, I’m more than a little lazy, so I never phoned or wrote Robin Lee Hatcher to express my sympathy or moral support. I like Robin, but I hadn’t seen or spoken to her for a while when her lawsuit was making news. I didn’t know the details of her case, and I assumed she was already getting so much support that one note more or less (such as one from me) wouldn’t matter. I mean, here was a writer who had enough evidence against a publisher to launch a class action suit against them (and get a settlement, as we

eventually saw), so *surely* everyone was behind her. Hullo, withholding monies! Isn’t that one of the chief evils a publisher is capable of, one of the foremost crimes for which every writers organization in the country should, at the very least, publicly and unconditionally condemn them? Isn’t it perhaps the single most justifiable reason for writers to call them bad names? Like, oh, pirates, rapists, and thieves? For example. In case you were searching for the right words.

Ever since SFWA caught a publisher withholding some \$250,000 back royalties from Andre Norton and several other writers years ago — back when \$250,000 was really worth something — I’ve always assumed that plenty of publishers are withholding money from writers, and that finding it is mainly a question of having enough lawyers, accountants, money, time, and patience to find it. Oh, and a fair bit of luck, too; those missing millions at Viking a few years ago suggest that even publishers don’t necessarily know what has happened to monies that might be yours.

Anyhow, after Robin’s lawsuit was settled, I was struck by how little support she got, when she described her ordeal in a public letter. Why, I wondered? Good grief, how hard is it to say, “Withholding authors’ money is *bad*?” Since the publisher had agreed to pay a settlement of a cool million, was anyone really worried that Dorchester was innocent and might be *unfairly* condemned in print or in public?

I’ve regularly seen people write extraordinarily vile things about their fellow writers online and in the trades, things so ill-mannered that even *my* mind boggles. So why are so many people afraid to publicly say, as I will cheerfully say now, Dorchester did a really bad thing and I unconditionally condemn them for it? I — me, personally, Laura Resnick — declare that they were terribly, unforgivably wrong for withholding monies from writers. Shouldn’t there be some sort of 12-step program they have to attend now? You know: Hi, our name is Dorchester, and we’re recovering from a tendency to hoard money that isn’t rightfully ours?

However, I pose my question rhetorically. I know why people don’t want to say or write these things in public, as well as why whole organizations might shy away from doing so. Everyone is afraid. Of what? Well, for one thing, of that mysterious and menacing all-American word: lawsuit.

I still remember seeing someone on some e-list (possibly Ninlink) post a comment about the then-blossoming Dailey/Roberts situation... only to be immediately advised by someone else that if she didn’t phrase it *exactly* right, using the appropriate non-committal legalese, she could be sued by Dailey. Just in case that was an accurate

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶





# THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ warning, I never expressed an opinion, written or verbal, about the scandal thereafter to anyone but my immediate circle of trusted friends. Nor was this the only time I saw or heard someone warned that to discuss the case in mixed company (i.e. people you don't trust amidst the people you do) was to risk legal action; always, by the way, potentially from Dailey — never from Nora Roberts, the wronged party who was bringing suit against Dailey.

The public comments about the Dailey/Roberts situation which I most vividly remember, however, were those which I saw online and, even more shockingly, in the *Romance Writers Report*, suggesting that Nora should just get over it. Move on. Stop being so selfish. So Janet Dailey swiped a few things — so what? It's not as if Nora can't afford it, what with the money she makes, the fame she accrues. What's the big fat hairy deal?

I was so appalled, I actually wrote a furious letter to the *RWR* in response to one of these letters. Then I came to my senses and deleted it. There are some people with whom you can reason, argue, enter into spirited discussion. Then there are those who just should have been drowned at birth and, if we're lucky, will soon be taken out of the gene pool by alien abductors. I've always assumed — because I couldn't bear to think otherwise — that the people suggesting Nora should just "get over" Dailey's plagiarism of her work were just embittered wannabes, unpubs who will never ever have what it takes to write a salable novel and compete professionally. No professional (or potential professional), I've steadfastly believed, could genuinely think such asinine drivel. Am I wrong, so wrong? Are there actual professional writers among those "just lie back and enjoy it" morons? Is that even possible?

I once threatened to hurt an editor if he dared to change a word without my permission. (I think of this as a generational improvement, actually, since I've heard my father, a science fiction writer, threaten to fly to New York and kill an editor — "rip your heart out of your chest" were, I believe, his exact words — if he made changes without permission.) I nearly started crying once when I saw a short story of mine mutilated beyond recognition after it was too late for me to pull it; in other words, the title and some sentences had been changed without my permission. Hey, I'm not incapable of cooperation, but I sweat damn hard over my prose, and it is, after all, *my* name which goes on it — and the only name which should *ever* go on it. My work is as unique to me as my fingerprints, my voice, or my burbling girlish laughter. (Okay, okay. Whatever.) I make the work better when I'm told to make it better, and I make it shorter or longer or less profane when told that's my only option if

I want to be paid. But it's *mine*, and apart from one or two literary youngsters with whom I quickly parted company, everyone I've ever worked with has respected this. Maybe because however unique my prose is, my feelings about it are, in fact, common.

I've always assumed that every writer feels this passion for her craft, this ownership of her prose, this umbilical relationship with the pages which appear as the product of her imagination, her name plastered all over them. Doesn't every writer feel like both spouse and parent of the work she sends out into the world to stand or fall on its own, to be praised or condemned, applauded or ridiculed, bought or passed over by people who will never know what it is to sit at the typewriter alone and forgotten, at the keyboard enthused and despairing, at the blank page which is our only companion and our unfathomable challenge year after year, hour after hour, word after word?

Doesn't every writer see her blood passing for ink and her heartbeat passing for typeface day after day? Doesn't every writer own her prose, in her private self, the way we own our loves, our fears, our courage, and our flaws? Is it only me? Surely not. If it were only me, I wouldn't get so many heartbroken phone calls from friends along the lines of: They've changed the title; they hate the book and want me to rewrite almost everything; I've been instructed to eliminate the best friend; my editor actually wrote "ugh!" in the margin; production says I have to get rid of 5,000 words however I can. And so on.

So when I consider how I feel about my work, I can only imagine (with a noticeable rise in body temperature) how I would feel upon enduring what Nora has gone through — or Gina Wilkins, or others. I never thought the pirates, rapists, and thieves in this business would be among *us*. I'm so naive. I always thought, fine, another writer might not like me, might even kick me when I'm down — but steal from me, rape my work? No way! What *writer* would do that to another writer?

Well, time taught me better, and Nora's case was simply the most high profile. Two days after I heard the rumors, I was watching Nora on CNN and reading Dailey's statement in the papers. (By the way, I've wondered to this very day: Has anyone ever heard of this mysterious condition which causes the sufferer to plagiarize? I've lived among writers my whole life and have never heard of this illness apart from Dailey's statement.) The kielbasa hit the fan with a messy splatter, and the media had a field day trying to portray Nora Roberts and Janet Dailey as divas in a madcap cat-fight about books which were, of course, all indistinguishable anyhow.

I felt for Nora; but I scarcely know her, so I never wrote or phoned. Hell, she's one of the most prominent writers in the business; surely she had all the support she needed, right? (Okay, so maybe a simple note wouldn't have hurt.) I

eventually read a resolution of the lawsuit, which indicated that Dailey was guilty of multiple counts of plagiarism from Roberts. Yet, in addition to still seeing people suggesting Nora was taking this too seriously, I also still saw people cautioning against publicly referring to Janet Dailey as a plagiarist. And since the ramifications of legalese are well beyond my capacity as a mere prose professional to understand, I still kept my mouth shut in all public forums.

Well, Nora's right, she's so right. So let me stand up and be counted. Plagiarism is dead wrong. There's no excuse whatsoever for it. What Janet Dailey did was dead wrong. There's no excuse whatsoever for it. Plagiarism is a profound ethical and legal violation. A writer is always, without exception, obliged to prosecute a plagiarist, above all, to protect the work — which cannot, after all, protect itself.

But let's go a step further here, to a new development, which shocks me even more than the original scandal did. What, I ask, could Harper Books possibly be thinking of? I've wondered this ever since I saw a new Dailey book on the stands, one which they've published.

Fine, fair enough, before the lawsuit, Harper didn't know what Dailey was doing. But they know now, for goodness sake! So why are they publishing a plagiarist? I'm really curious. Did they even hesitate over the moral ramifications of rewarding a plagiarist with continued publication? Do they have any concerns about what'll happen if she does it again? I assume (perhaps erroneously) that their legal department has drafted a contract that protects Harper against a relapse of Dailey's "condition;" but if she does it again, and if you're the next writer whose work she's caught lifting, wouldn't you be even more interested, at this juncture, in going after her publisher than in going after

her? Harper is no longer an innocent bystander caught in this saga by chance. They're now actively participating — and doing so with chilling pragmatism. Did we all catch Nora's description of how Harper has used the plagiarism scandal as a hook to promote Dailey's book?

Of course, the fear of opening one's mouth in a scandal involving a publisher is perhaps a hundred times greater than that of offending a writer whom we suspect could probably still afford better lawyers than we could. What's one of the chief reasons publishers so often get to walk all over writers? Because they have more lawyers and deeper pockets than we do. Also because other writers always assure us (perhaps accurately) that if we get into a lawsuit against a publisher, we'll never work again.

Yeah, writers have lots of sensible reasons to keep their mouths shut. So do writers' organizations. Apart from the whole nasty possibility of lawsuits, writers' organizations often balance certain practical considerations against the risk of public statements that might offend.

Nonetheless, without naming names (as I have done so impetuously here), how hard is it for any writer, writing organization, literary agent, or — yes! — publisher to say: Plagiarism is bad! Publishing plagiarists is bad! Withholding monies owed to writers is bad! It's always wrong, in every instance, and there's never any excuse for it. And it should always be quickly and thoroughly punished.

Am I right? (Waiting, waiting...)

— **Laura Resnick**

Stay tuned for the answers to these and myriad other questions on this subject in the May issue of *NINK*. **TdR**

## **MEMBER News.....**

**Congratulations** to our newest NYT whiz kids! I saw on Ninlink that Chris Rimmer, Alison Hart, and Cheryl St. John's *Montana Mavericks Big Sky Bride* anthology made the *NYT* extended list!

**And a special congrats** to Vella Munn who announced that a small s/f magazine in New York "is buying my article about my grandfather!! Homer Eon Flindt died or was killed when my mother was six, but although he was still in his 30s, he'd already sold over 20 science fiction short stories, one book, and several early day film treatments (or

whatever they called them back then). The truth behind his mysterious death will never be known, but our family has held onto the letters he and his wife wrote each other shortly before his death when financial circumstances separated them for eight months and those are precious. My aunt died last year so she won't see the article but my mother and uncle will. Now what am I going to do with the \$25 I'm being paid?" Vella who really, really wishes she'd known her grandfather.

**And please see Breaking News**

for Nancy Martin's information regarding her newest project, *NovelsNow.com*!

**What's New and Noteworthy** in your lives? Let us know at "Member News" — just contact the editor.

### ***In Our Next Issue.....***

An important report on plagiarism... plus more conference "sneak peaks" from Zita...all the usual suspects, er, columnists...and your letters—if you write 'em.

# .....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 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."

NINC Member	Book Title/Publisher	Feb 3	Feb 10	Feb 17	Feb 24
Sandra Brown	<i>Bittersweet Rain</i> , Warner	15	23	39	39
Stella Cameron	<i>All Smiles</i> , Zebra		71n	76	105
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Courtship</i> , Jove	31	53	112	
Shannon Drake	<i>Come the Morning</i> , Zebra	94n	51	74	94
Heather Graham	<i>Triumph</i> , Signet	52	92		
Carolyn Hart	<i>Death on the River Walk</i> , Avon Twilight				150n
Joan Johnston	<i>The Cowboy</i> , Island			24n	22
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Call It Destiny</i> , Mira		43n	42	73
Kat Martin	<i>Silk and Steel</i> , St. Martin's Press	80			
Cathy Maxwell	<i>A Scandalous Marriage</i> , Avon			77n	49
Linda Lael Miller	<i>One Wish</i> , Pocket Star	116n	15	30	40
Susan Elizabeth Phillips	<i>First Lady</i> , Avon			12n	14
Amanda Quick	<i>I Thee Wed</i> , Bantam		18n	29	41
Julia Quinn	<i>The Duke and I</i> , Avon	65	97		
Christine Rimmer, Jennifer Green, et al *	<i>Montana Mavericks: BigSky Brides</i> , Silhouette		91n	107	143
Nora Roberts	<i>Jewels of the Sun</i> , Jove	29	49	64	65

\* et al: indicates that the book was written with other authors who are not members of NINC

### Novelists' Ink

Novelists, Inc.

*An organization for writers of popular fiction*

P.O. Box 1166

Mission KS 66222-0166

Publishing Services by Huseby Agency, Ltd

FIRST CLASS MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
FARGO ND  
PERMIT #281