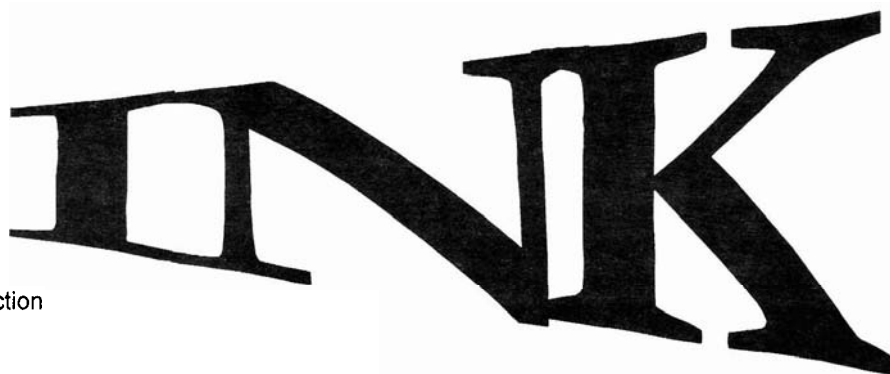


Novelists'



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

Everything You Didn't Want To Know (But Definitely Need To) About What Booksellers Think About Writers

By VELLA MUNN

[Ed's note: this is the last of a 3-part series wherein our Ms. Munn plays mother-confessor to the bookselling world.]

As I promised in August, the final section will address several "let down the hair" issues. I threw out two related questions, one on what booksellers would tell publishers/distributors about how they do their business; the other flipped that by asking what publishers, distributors, and writers need to know about how booksellers operate that they don't. First, how booksellers perceive the good, bad, and ugly regarding publishers and distributors.

"I believe publishers could save a lot of money by not printing so much promotional material. These large catalogues may be good for large buyers but those buyers can be isolated without sending so much promotional material by mail to us small independents. Fliers and brochures would

do as much or more. We would like to see the publishers have their own book shows with the authors present for book signings. We attend the BookExpo, the MidSouth Independent Book Sellers, and we may go this year to the CEBS. It really helps us to meet authors and to hear authors read from their writings." (Right on!)

"Quit reprinting so many of the titles. It makes customers mad to buy a book that they think is new and find out it's a reprint. Some publishers don't even tell you it's a reprint on the order forms or catalogs."

"Make sure the blurb on the back of the book tells about the story—not just reviews about how great the book is! Have the cover show either location, characters, or something about the story—not just pretty flowers. You have approximately five seconds to interest the reader."

"Publishers ignore the smaller markets. They are getting better but they haven't learned we **Cont. on Page 8** ▶ ▶ ▶

Stalker in Cyberspace

By DAWN E. RENO

It's been approximately 30 years since I first broke into publishing, and I

really haven't had a lot of problems in the writing profession until the past couple of months . . . Now I'm being stalked in cyberspace by a former student.

Because I've spent so many years in this profession, most of my friends are also writers. Some of them have dealt with plagiarism, some with professional jealousy, some with major career changes or lifestyle slips-and-falls due to the crash-and-burn aspects of this business. Personally, I've had to shift emphasis from my

novels to my nonfiction or from my children's books to journalism at least three, maybe four, times in my career. I've dealt with my own insecurities about my work, as well as those few and far between feelings that I couldn't write any better if I tried. I've fallen prey to my misguided beliefs that the editor-of-the-moment would protect me from the takeover-of-the-moment, and I've passed on hard earned lessons about the business to my colleagues on the way up. I've lent a shoulder to friends whose careers **Cont. on Page 5** ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN.....

Vancouver 2000. By now, you'll all have heard what a terrific conference it was and how much fun we had, what we learned, what we hashed around, what we left for another day. Although as I write this, it's still late September and I haven't even figured out what to wear for ten days in the Pacific Northwest. But I, and the rest of the NINC board, have been very involved with the conference planning, and we're all excited. Many thanks to conference coordinator Zita Christian for all her hard work. Zita also has a very demanding day job, and yet she's managed to pull off one of our most ambitious programs ever. Kate Dooley, our meeting planner at Mountain State Travel in West Virginia, has gone above and beyond the call of duty—I've received many e-mails and calls from NINC members telling me how amazing she is.

But a successful NINC conference isn't about the people who put it together. What makes a conference successful is the people who show up, who share their expertise, who ask the good questions and raise the level of discussion. The NINC members who agree to moderate sessions. The NINC members who speak up...and listen...and continue the discussion when they get home. The agents and editors who give their time, in this case to fly across the country and spend a weekend with us in Vancouver. The local book people like Jennifer McCord. The outside speakers like Neal Coonerty, Jan Phillips, Yolande Spears, Tara Twigg, Alan Kaufman, and Bruce Pitt-Payne, who took the time to come to Vancouver and talk with this group, Novelists, Inc., they'd never even heard of.

It's not just a successful conference that requires our participation as NINC members—it's the success of NINC itself. I go back to how I started my term as president...we all have something to contribute. I know it's popular to say no. I've read it in virtually every "self-help" article and column I've come across—*just say no*. But that's too simplistic.

Say "yes" when you can...

The point isn't to say no—the point is not to overburden yourself with commitments you can't keep. The point isn't *never* to volunteer, *never* to say yes. The point is to say yes when you can, when it matters, when it's stimulating, when it refills your well, when it's something you can do.

I know this organization matters to most of us. I know most of us would probably like to do *something*—moderate a discussion at the conference, write a letter to the editor, contribute from time to time on Ninclink, write an article for the newsletter, pass the word within the writing community about NINC. There are lots of short-term, finite things we can do to help.

Perhaps this is a good time for me to tell you about some of the committees NINC operates. If one sparks your interest, why not get in touch with Barbara Keiler, next year's president, or me? Why not say—okay, I can sit on a committee. I can chair a committee. I can help wherever you need me...I can do *this* much...

Advocacy: This committee investigates and recommends action on issues of concern to writers. This year, advocacy has looked into such issues as copyright infringement, the sale of ARCs, and frequently asked questions from authors on publishing matters.

Internet: This committee takes care of all things Internet for NINC. It looks after the www.ninc.com website—the technical stuff is handled by our webmaster, Craig Johnson. The committee handles content, both the "public"

pages and the Members Only pages: archived newsletter articles, links to interesting sites, links to member sites, information on members' new releases, the Agents Guide, the e-mail members' guide...we're still on the ground floor of building what could be the best writers' site on the internet. The Internet committee also provides a Ninlink moderator and our agent-editor database keeper.

Outreach: This committee invites other authors to join NINC...romance, mystery, suspense, science fiction, fantasy, mainstream...we're always pleased to welcome new members.

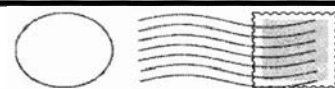
Newsletter: Okay, this isn't a committee—the newsletter editor is a member of the board, and people who write articles do get paid. The work is less daunting if we have lots of ideas coming in, lots of people willing to write

articles, lots of people passing along Breaking News to be checked out and Membership News to report—people who let it be known they can take on a newsletter job if needed. And letters to the editor. We *all* love letters to the editor!

The point is there are a million ways, big and small, that all of us participate in making sure NINC remains a successful organization. Whether it's answering an e-mail from someone interested in hiring your agent or letting people know you'd be interested in a board position, you do make a difference. I see that every day as president. Many thanks to all 600-or-so of you.

— **Carla Neggers**

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.

NINK Issues Strike Chord

Another terrific NINK! I read the September issue cover to cover in one sitting. Many of the topics raised throughout the newsletter have been ones I have been thinking about and acting upon for a number of years now. Given the space considerations of this column, I will limit myself to two comments:

1) Olivia Rupprecht is not the only author I have encountered who, upon hearing the suggestion that "people who rely on copyright probably need to change their business model," wonders where the handiest bomb might be. I realize that Olivia's position is at least partly rhetorical, since by the end of her article, she is ready to reconsider her business model. Still, it might be worth noting that the older, more literal sense of copyright—i.e. "the right to copy" a work which an author sells to a publisher so that the publisher has the right to print copies of that work and then sell those copies—is close to having outlived its usefulness. In this age of easy and instantaneous reproduction, it is becoming more fruitful to think about copyright as the "tether to the producer of the work," that is, the legal and moral string that

attaches the author to her work no matter how many times or in what format the work is reproduced. If copyright is seen in this new way, the all-important economic question can shift from "How can I insure that I am paid for every instance of a reader reading my work?" to "How can I be paid fairly for the production of my work, given the size of my readership and my value to that readership?"

The rise of the mass-market paperback over the last seven decades produced the former question ("How can I insure that I get paid for every instance of a reader reading my work?") since cheap manufacturing made it possible for many people to buy individual copies of particular books. Because the physical format of the paperback could withstand a handful of extra readings, we authors used to debate whether we shouldn't also be paid for those extra readings generated by used bookstores.

Now we've arrived at the point where a single posting of a work can be read by millions and millions of people. To my way of thinking, the trick is not to find a way to chase down all the reading rabbits and stuff them back into the royalty-paying hat (although Stephen King does seem to be having success along those lines), but rather to update the public library model of book circulation. The time is upon us to figure out a way for the author to be paid fairly for the production of a work that has the potential to be downloaded from some database and reproduced an unlimited number of times.

Tricky questions immediately pose themselves: What database? Who owns/operates it? How does the author get paid? Who determines what is fair pay?

When I first saw where the publishing industry was headed over four years ago, no commercial publisher could evaluate what it might mean to pay an author fairly for the production of a work whose revenue stream might not ▶ ▶ ▶



▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ be based on a strict pay-per-read basis. I also didn't have the number of pay-per-read readers (i.e. sales) to have inspired a commercial publisher to pay me what I considered fair for the production of my work. So I had nothing to lose by opening my own publishing studio and to begin answering some of the tricky questions myself.

Now all these years later, I admit that I still print multiple copies of an individual work (i.e. do print-runs) and then sell those individual copies. Not surprisingly, a large percentage of my sales are to libraries. I have also moved my first reincarnation romance, which sold out in hardback, into an on-demand format that sells multiple copies every month. Since on-demand sales are still based on a pay-per-download economic model, not much has changed. However, I have now begun to offer my second reincarnation romance in installments to a limited audience for free, and suddenly I'm seeing an upswing in the traffic to my studio, especially from international visitors, and the almost magical realization of writing revenue from sources other than individual pay-per-read customers.

This current revenue surge might be just a coincidence or the result of things coming together after several years of hard work. In any case, no one is more surprised than I am that my studio is on track to post a profit in the year 2000. My point is: it is beginning to look as if achieving a self-sustaining writing life in the context of a new business model—one based on something other than a mass-market-pay-per-read basis—is entirely possible. NB: I am not saying that it is easy.

2) Jean Brashear's interview with Isabel Swift about recruiting younger readers as well as younger writers into the romance genre dovetailed perfectly with Olivia's e-book article, since it's pretty clear that the folks in the crucial 18 to 35 age range are the most comfortable with the electronic and online worlds and are the most sophisticated about how they work.

One of the keys to my (teeny, tiny bud of) publishing success has been that all the people who work directly with me in my studio are under the age of 25. It wasn't genius that led me to that age group but luck. I happen to live in an environment rich in bright and talented undergraduate and graduate students. They have been teaching me an enormous amount about the aesthetics and pragmatics of the technological opportunities available to the writer today. They are also well versed in the global implications of the new marketplace. It is largely through their new insights and understandings that I am beginning to live the studio writing life. In other words, I couldn't agree more with Isabel Swift: a lot of the creative talent in the 18 to 35 age group *is* flowing to the start-ups.

All this is to say that I found the articles in the September *NINK* exactly what I am looking for from our organization: informed and creative reports to the dramatic developments

occurring minute-by-minute in the world of publishing.

— **Julie Tetel Andresen**

PS: Olivia Rupprecht produced another fine column for October's *NINK* in her interview with Claire Zion and the iPublish project now being launched by Time Warner. In response to that article, I would like to make 3 points:

a) eBook production is only "much more difficult" than print book production for a publisher whose entire corporate structure has been built up around print book production and now needs to change;

b) brand name authors, such as Stephen King, are not the only ones who attract readers directly to their sites; the fact of the matter is: when you market directly to your niche, your niche comes directly to you; and

c) although I said in my above letter that studio publishing isn't easy, I would like to point out that it's also an awful lot of fun.

Publishers such as Time Warner can serve very useful purposes for authors and do great things for them. No doubt about it. At the same time, there are distinct advantages to "flying below the radar screen" of New York publishing, especially given the current technological and economic conditions.

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

Daphne Atkeson, Paradise Valley AZ
Lois Faye Dyer, Port Orchard WA

New Members

Deborah B Matthews, Montgomery AL
Karen Harbaugh, Auburn WA

**NINC has room to grow...
recommend membership to your colleagues.
New members can apply
online at www.ninc.com.**

CYBER-STALKER

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 1*

have taken nosedives while holding my breath in the hopes that my own wouldn't do the same. Through it all, I've been of the mind that this is the nature of the business and whatever I learn, I can pass on to students and writers who have not yet published. But this attack makes no sense and I'm baffled about how to "learn" from it.

I've always tried to treat my students and fellow writers who aren't published fairly—and I thought they would treat me in the same manner. I was wrong and horribly naïve. The ironic part of this whole story is that the former student and unpublished writer who's now making a career out of trying to ruin *my* career hasn't been part of my life for at least three years.

Before I tell you the history of the current incident and offer you, my colleagues, my experience so that you can learn from my problems and decide how to deal with these issues in case the same happens to you (heaven forbid), let me tell you I have not lived in a fantasy world where nothing negative has ever happened.

Through the years I've been a journalist, novelist, children's book author, speaker, and professor, I've worked with a man directly related to one of the biggest Mafia names in history (you'd all know him—and have probably seen one of the many movies featuring him) and spent many sleepless nights worried that he'd set his "people" on me because our business arrangement went up in smoke. It was two years before I had the guts to destroy the sensitive files and family photos he'd left in my possession.

And then there was the writer I met at a conference in Vermont, a woman who became a student of mine and wanted me to help her learn how to use her computer (as though that would make her writing more saleable)

and who took it upon herself to call me at home at all hours of the night . . . and who ultimately committed suicide. For a long time, I thought I might have contributed to that suicide because I'd told her I simply couldn't take her late evening/early morning phone calls any longer.

Then what about the student who cornered me in my office one afternoon, enraged because I hadn't noticed his brilliance. He leaned into my "personal space" to inform me that it was "molecularly

The point is, as public figures who enjoy a modicum of success, we leave ourselves wide open to the loonies of the world. And I've met my share.

impossible" for him to write more than one draft of his paper. When I flunked him, he sent a letter to the head of my department, saying I was prejudiced. The only reason it didn't go any further was because he claimed I was prejudiced against brilliant students—and my department head already knew my IQ was higher than my student's.

There are many other stories with which I could bore you, but the point is: as public figures who enjoy a modicum of success, we leave ourselves wide open to the loonies of the world. And I've met my share.

That said, why is the woman who's devoting herself to my

destruction bothering me? She doesn't have any more power than the Mafia man, she's no more insane than the woman who committed suicide, and she hasn't wrongly accused me of prejudice, as my student did. What she's done is to attack me on the Net by writing the most spurious reviews of my books she can and posting them in a public forum where my books are sold: Amazon.com. Does she have a right to do so? Of course, she does. In fact, Amazon *encourages* nonprofessional reviewers to add their two-cents' worth to each book's web page. Customers offer their recommendations or negative commentary on all types of books, and most of the time, we writers *also* encourage such response to our works. I welcome such reviews and think it's wonderful that Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Borders, Powell's and others give the average reader time and space to speak about their preferences.

But what happens when the reviewer uses that tool as a weapon? What about when an unpublished writer who's jealous of a published one decides to use such a tool to sling arrows or to launch missiles? What if a writer/student/spurned lover decides s/he can utilize several different identities to stuff the "ballot box" with the most negative critiques possible? And what if s/he follows up that critique with emails to your home address, and letters to your boss, phone calls to your husband and friends? And what if that unpublished writer thinks that *you* are wrong if you try to stop him/her?

Is this illegal? Do we have any recourse if it is? Yes, on both counts.

Thankfully, Amazon responds quickly to customer complaints, especially if that customer is a published author (and as writers, we are usually customers who spend a great deal of money filling

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BREAKING NEWS

COMPILED BY PAMELA BROWNING

Pirates On The Horizon

Forrester Research, an Internet consulting company, claims that by 2005 book publishers will lose \$1.5 billion to Internet piracy. They issued a report claiming that unauthorized duplication of e-books and other data—à la Napster—cannot be controlled by lawsuits or encryption, and will thus allow for a “collapse of control” and a decentralization of power.

But wait! Eric Scheirer, the analyst who wrote the report, stated, “As control over distribution slips away from major publishers, a lot of the money they’re making today will instead be earned by artists and service vendors.”

The report says that authors will gain \$1.3 billion and third-party vendors will make an additional \$2.8 billion in what the report labels “a historic transfer of revenues.”

No info on exactly how all that money is expected to leap into authors’ pockets.

Amazon Apologia

Amazon.com decried “some news reports over the last several weeks [that] have incorrectly characterized a recent Amazon.com random price test as a test based on customer demographic information. These reports were incorrect and not based on facts.”

It seems that for five whole days the company offered customers a “random” discount between 20 percent and 40 percent on DVDs. Amid cries that the company used information in its files to determine which ▶ ▶ ▶

CYBER-STALKER

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ bookcases with purchases made on their site). But that only takes care of one part of the problem. Yes, you can get some of the reviews on your books removed if you contact the right person and offer the proof that the reviews are written by someone whose only purpose is to damage your reputation. But that’s not the only damage done. In my case, I spent more than a week tracking down my former student, the unpublished writer. And while I was tracking her down and contacting my editors, Amazon, and my boss, she was systematically working up more reviews (under more aliases) and plugging them in on my other booksites. When I read the first review, I thought I truly *had* written a bad book. Maybe I’d lost my touch. Maybe I should just teach and forget about writing. Maybe my agent and editors would read the review and start doubting my next book. Maybe the review would stop anyone else checking the site from buying that particular book.

I felt . . . well, hurt.

BUT when I found the second review, I was angry. No, furious is a better word. Enraged! Another four hours of computer research and I discovered who was writing the reviews, but I still hadn’t made the connection between the reviewer’s name and the former student—probably because I hadn’t done anything to the student beyond giving her some honest advice and what I thought was a fairly good grade: a B.

After the third review, I was sent into action once again. This time, my many hours on the computer doing research and finding the “back doors” helped me (I knew surfing the Net would reap some benefits some day). This time I found her email address: Bingo. And I put two

and two together.

She’d been a student when I worked for Writer’s Digest Schools, and I distinctly remembered her saying she had been under a psychiatrist’s care. She was often moody, always argumentative, and critical of everything I said. I often wondered why she bothered signing up for the course if she didn’t feel like learning the lessons I had to offer from my three decades in the business. But I let it pass.

Everyone makes their choices, and hers was to believe that she would be the exception to the rule, that she could walk directly into an editor’s office and plunk her manuscript on the desk, that she would be earning six figures during her first year of publishing, and that she could quit her job as soon as she finished the rather poor first draft of a rather uninteresting novel. You learn to nod and smile and let writers like these continue to bumble their way through their careers.

So, on she bumbled, and on I went with my own career. Or so I thought. Obviously, she tucked away her jealousies and insecurities, let them bubble up into her throat, and waited until she could focus on taking me down. Perhaps she thinks by doing so, there will be a place in the publishing industry for her?

Yes, I’d put two and two together after a while, but I wasn’t sure what to do about it. Yes, I convinced Amazon to take her reviews down and to send her a warning, but not before she found my email address, and as a result, my phone number. Then my personal website turned up damaged, and phone calls started coming through to my boss. She’s unstable, I thought, and I remembered hearing the same thing several years ago when a certain writer plagiarized another (you all know who I mean). Yet being unstable does not give another writer the right to attack, and it doesn’t make the doubts about



BREAKING NEWS

your own writing—or about human kindness—disappear.

Will she go further? Will she attack in the middle of the night? Will she send me a virus that will destroy my computer and all the files on it? And what about those hours that I spent researching and trying to stop her? Is there nothing else I can do?

No, there is something. I can share my experience with other writers, to warn those who have recently published books that there might be someone in their past (or present) who'll discover the perfect way to mangle a writer's confidence by plugging in some negative reviews or to attack your webpage or, even worse, to use the information you publish on your personal website to make someone you love believe you've done something inappropriate.

Am I the first writer to whom this has happened? Of course not. Am I going to be the last? That's a resounding "no." Stephen King has made millions writing about writers who've been stalked by fans or other writers. Nora Roberts has let us all know how miserable she felt when plagiarized by Janet Dailey. Even celebrities who regularly deal with stalkers have realized the world often requires them to change their own ideals—for instance, Rosie O'Donnell has recently hired a bodyguard so her son can go to school—breaking her own publicly known belief that handguns should be outlawed.

Why did I think it wouldn't happen to me? Because I'm nobody. I'm just a writer who struggles to make it with twenty books published over a twenty-year-period. I'm not on the bestseller list and never have been. I don't write controversial material. I just make a living—and not a very good one—from my writing.

Maybe I should look at the bright side: there's a book in this somewhere

but checking the latest list of what's been published for summer reading, it seems like everyone else has already realized it. Could it be that other writers have already experienced what I have?

And the story's not over yet. Though my nerves are still a little frayed from my "stalker reviewer" (her last review for my electronic book *Loving Marie*, a Frankfurt eBook Award nominee, was glowing . . . and entered months after she was told to stay off Amazon), I have other cyberstalkers to worry about.

Just tonight, as I was about to leave my office at the college where I work, I noticed that one of my students in the online creative writing class I teach was not registered. After doing a little research, I discovered that the "student" had *never* registered for my class. Instead, he had hacked in somehow and was now lurking throughout all the private documents I'd created just for the students who registered through my college to take the course (and paid all their fees, no less).

Somehow he had enrolled himself (even though I'd personally set the parameters for the course so that no one but I could enroll students), created a password (okay, so it was an easy one to crack—I told everyone to use the last four digits of their social security number), and even did several of the assignments (this is a stupid hacker. How many people hack into a site to DO homework??). Come to find out, the student is dual-enrolled (he's in high school and college simultaneously) and is getting a degree in computer applications. Yet another hacker on my horizon.

The nightmare continues.

▶▶▶ customers could afford to pay more, customers who paid a higher price than others for the same product began to protest.

The company did issue refunds to the 6,896 people who bought DVDs during the test at prices higher than the lowest available. Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder and CEO, said, "We never tested and we never will test prices based on customer demographics. What we did was a random price test, and even that was a mistake because it created uncertainty for customers rather than simplifying their lives."

The company instituted a new policy that would "protect customers should we ever do random price testing again." They added that in the case of further testing, they will automatically give customers who purchased a test item the lowest test price for that item at the conclusion of the test period—thereby ensuring that all customers pay the lowest available price.

More Amazon

Meanwhile, and presumably not because of the foregoing, Wall Street analysts either retained their ratings for the company or lowered them.

Amazon says it intends to become profitable by maximizing existing assets and cutting back on growth and costs, including marketing. It said sales could rise more than 50 percent a year through 2010, and it wants to reduce costs 30 percent.

Comments reported in various news services:

"With recent management instability and a less than stellar track record of delivering on its profit goals, we remain cautious," Lehman Brothers analyst

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BREAKING NEWS

▶▶▶▶ Holly Becker wrote.
(CNET News.com)

"The focus on profits may be too little, too late in the near term," Lauren Levitan at Robertson Stephens wrote. (CNET News.com)

"The deceleration of revenue growth and lack of visibility into long-term profitability" concerns Merrill Lynch analyst Henry Blodget, who nevertheless reported that the company's future prospects were good. (Reuters)

Sara Farley, Paine Webber analyst, said she is concerned about the company's future scale through revenue growth, pressured product margins and unclear allocation of indirect costs. (Reuters)

Or Less Amazon?

Yahoo announced that BN.com is becoming a "featured merchant" on the leading portal's site, essentially replacing Amazon. Amazon said they wanted to focus on their marketing relationship with AOL.

The *Wall Street Journal* says it was "something of a blow to Yahoo" when Amazon let their agreement lapse.

At the same time, Amazon has renewed and expanded its 1998 agreement to be the featured retailer of books, music and video on Microsoft Network. The new deal places links to Amazon.com on a broader array of MSN pages, including results pages, key word searches and on any page where the Windows Media Player is being used.

'Twas But a Dream...

Don't believe rumors that Harlequin/Silhouette is acquiring paranormal romances for a Dreamscape line. Yes, there are Dreamscape books, but ▶▶▶

WHAT BOOKSELLERS THINK

▶▶▶▶ Continued from page 1

do have a large stake in making a bestseller. They put too much emphasis on chains. They don't always play fair."

"Have them talk to on-site salespeople in various regional stores. Why inflate prices if they are always discounted? Have plenty of stock for new books available to stores, especially if promo includes TV."

"The obvious thing would be the finances of the business. In order for independent bookstores to survive, more money must be able to trickle down. Workers at bookstores should be able to make more than subsistence wages. The most often heard concern among booksellers is where the next generation is going to come from. Keeping staff at low-paying jobs is too hard when the silicon world with its huge wages is at your doorstep. The other thing is the actual, not the discounted, price of books. If the majority of hardbacks could retail for under \$20, we could sell a lot more and have a lot less returns."

"Publishers are really improving—some are downright excellent in understanding our needs in how to get the right books to the right people at the right time. Profitability is a real problem for our industry. It must change."

"Cut prices back to \$6/pbk and \$-20, better (at) about \$18.95 and hope to flatten out discounting, and also put a ceiling on book returns. Much of the waste is created by returns, which could be eliminated. Otherwise publishers are in the grip of the same market focus affecting other industries and like it or not, can't do much about it. This is a very healthy opportunity time for small presses, so the news is not all bad."

"Never forget about the total channel of distribution of your product. If you make exclusive distribution deals with only a portion of your channel, your books are not efficiently reaching the end consumer

and you will ultimately pay the price of that exclusivity in multiple ways. My bookstore would not be a success if I relied primarily on one or two large customers."

"I don't think as a bookseller I could tell a publisher how well or how badly they are doing business. What we get is the end product: the books. The only nitpick that I have is that publishers do not enforce a universal street date/release date for all retailers, giving retailers who don't sell primarily books the ability to break a street date with impunity."

"For god's sake, make sure the little guys get fast treatment and try to avoid the most common mistakes: poor shipping (poorly packed books), errors in packing (short slips, etc) and make it as easy as possible for us to talk to someone about customer service needs. Also publishers need to spend less money on stupid promotional gimmicks and humongous advances for celebrity authors and concentrate more on having a diverse mid-list and on finding truly well-written books in all subject areas—diversity of titles is very important."

To that, I can only add, "amen."

When it came to opening up about what they believe publishers need to know about how they conduct their business, booksellers were no



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less articulate:

"They don't know that we know what a good book is. A good bookseller can sell a good book. A good bookseller can sell a bad book. I can sell a bad book but know that the customer who reads that bad book will remember who put it in their hands and won't come back to that bookseller. The quality of books needs to be improved. The more good books, the more customers will come back. Too many bad books and who will want to read when you can turn on the TV. I need to be able to sell good books."

"We are bombarded with marketing ploys but the best sources of info for us are clear, concise reviews by unbiased reviewers and a picture of the cover helps too. Well-informed and helpful sales reps who know our store are *invaluable*."

"Fair terms make all bookstores, large and small, healthier. Think long-term profit realization rather than immediate cost covering. I tend to concentrate more on publishers and writers who support independent bookstores. The opposite is true as well."

"In my case, nothing. I've educated them, sometimes with some real arguments, but I go to NY once a year and otherwise stay in touch so they know exactly how we work here and support us. We have almost none of the problems afflicting other bookstores because I anticipate them and work around them."

"Bookselling is a great vocation. We are the window to the consumer. The chains have great people, great leverage, great locations. The independent is essential—help us sell more books with autographings, displays, promotional material, etc."

"I think that a little respect would help. Like most businesses today, this is a lot of work. We are under constant worry of what is going to change. Gone are the days of getting up and doing your job. It seems that

it is just one onslaught after another e.g. chains, illegal discounts, cyberstores that don't have any fiscal responsibilities so can sell at whatever price because it's all not real (who would have been able to foresee that).

"Please excuse rant, I guess what I'm trying to say is that we have real fiscal responsibilities and it gets tiring to hear about what those that don't are achieving. Many of us work long hours without much financial return. This is our choice but we are still professional even though our income may not reflect our labors. I also think that readers should be given respect for their choices.

"Our customers are quite the informed literary bunch who are discriminating. I assume that this applies to much of the population, despite what the NYT bestseller list claims. I think that our store acts as a filter for this kind of person. We don't have everything like the large chain store and that means that our readers don't have to make their way through all kinds of rubbish that has no interest for them. I would remind publishers that quality still has a value."

"Lots of promo material gets trashed; no space for displays or cards or accessories. To have material used well, a store must have at least one staff member willing to promote, i.e. through book reading groups."

"I choose books to carry and sell by how much attention the publisher gives me. Of course I always carry everyone's lead titles, but I stock 20% more St. Martin's books because their reps actually see me. I don't usually even get a call from others. I push St Martin's books harder than I do others because my reps have told me something interesting about each one."

"Independent booksellers have to match the chain store discounts but they do not receive the same discount from the publisher. How can they stay in business?"

they are part of the Reader's Choice Program, a rotating selection of four romance novels catering to a specific niche genre being offered in the North American retail market. The program started in October 2000 and runs through the end of 2001.

Selections are being offered from Harlequin Regency Romances (Mills and Boon Historicals never before published in North America), Harlequin Intimacies (reissues of passion-themed books from different lines), Harlequin Prescription Romances (Mills & Boon Medicals never before published in North America) and Dreamscapes (sourced from Silhouette's former paranormal series, Shadows).

E-book Readers

Thomson Multimedia recently unveiled two e-book readers set to replace the Rocket eBook.

The lower-end model, with a 5.5-inch monochrome LCD touch screen and standard memory capacity of eight MB (enough to hold about 20 novels), will cost \$300—about \$50 higher than a similarly configured Rocket eBook. A color version is \$700. Both models include modems so readers can download books without a computer.

Publishers were disappointed that the devices were not priced more cheaply to stimulate demand.

E-developments

An article at <http://interactive.wsj.com/articles/SB969315307539977077.htm> reviews the basic major e-book developments of late. Michael Fragnito, head of e-books at B&N.com, says, "What's doing surprisingly well [in e-book format] is romance."



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How To Make Your Title Unforgettable

At the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association fall show in Portland, Oregon, Paisley Rekdal's book of poetry, *A Crash of Rhinos*, was mistakenly introduced in a slip of the tongue as *A Crash of Winos*, rendering it instantly memorable to everyone in attendance.

I don't know who the speaker was, but he has possibilities. My next book (shamelessly promoting here) is *Baby Christmas*. I'm trying to find someone sufficiently tongue-loose to announce it widely as Baby [name for intimate female body part a la Seinfeld].

Anybody?

Online Book Buying

An annual Consumer Book Buying Study conducted by *Publishers Weekly* and BookExpo America indicates that the Internet has not dramatically changed book buying yet. Still, online retailers continue slowly to gain market share.

More than half of those surveyed had bought a book online, 72 percent had shopped in chain bookstores, and only 28 percent had bought at independents. The study focused on the book buying habits of Internet users. Those who hadn't yet bought a book online cited concerns over credit card security as the biggest obstacle.

Two-thirds of the online book buyers polled know what an e-book is and 32 percent of those said they were likely to buy an e-book in the next year. Eleven percent say they have already read or purchased an e-book. Of those who had tried e-books, 78 percent

WHAT BOOKSELLERS THINK

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

"I keep the new books on my shelves face out for three months. I hand sell books that I have enjoyed or that another customer raves over. I special order books and I take requests for books that I don't have and network with other stores to find them. I take advance orders for books."

"We are doing more and more on the Internet. It is fast, convenient, and can be accessed any time of day or night. Publishers and distributors and writers do not contact me very much (thank goodness). But they could e-mail me with late breaking news. The ABA BookSense is starting to do this for us now. I believe the publishers and distributors should try for higher retail prices with greater discounts. They might do this by increasing the books' value, such as more pictures, better dust jackets and more attractive boards."

Finally—did you think I'd never get there—I asked booksellers if there was anything they'd like to add.

"I really enjoy selling books. Normally people don't come into a bookstore mad. They are very pleasant—love to discuss the books they have enjoyed—like to tell you about the ones they hated and why. It's a very nice place to work. Also, book readers are very honest people. I seldom have a check bounce. I doubt I've lost \$50 in 22 years. Customers are like family. It's a fun business!"

"The cost of a book has skyrocketed. Newly published authors have to promote themselves as well as their stories. Customers will buy a book written by an author they have met. Sorry I can't offer any sage answers. I have enjoyed selling books and will continue to do special events for charities and book signings at different locations such as carnivals, craft shows, banks, etc."

"I truly love my job. Wouldn't trade for anything."

"Yes, I believe that the personal touch still makes for a successful store, even if it's a mega-store like mine. I hand sell tons of books and the customers appreciate my recommendations. You know, the 'if you like this book (or author), try this one' routine."

"I would love to see self-published authors have more a sense of the business. It seems sad to see people put so much effort into writing their books and have so little understanding of the next steps. I'm sure this has always been difficult, but as it gets easier to publish one's own work, I seem to have to explain the business to more and more newcomers. As I think about those subjects, I think of so many odds and ends. Yes, people do judge books by their covers, don't have your cousin design it unless his name is Chip. On the positive side, good books are still being published so readers are being satisfied."

"I love the business of bookselling. If I didn't, I would simply refer to my work as a retailer."

"Publishers need to remember that the typical independent bookseller is a devoted, caring business person who survives on their profit margin and whose success is due to a passion for reading and for getting good books into the hands of their customers. Books to us are not product and we appreciate publishers who appear to be as dedicated to this mission as we are. And sadly, these publishers seem to be rarer and rarer."

"I love books."

And on that warm and fuzzy note—THE END.

"A writer is someone who writes, that's all. You can't stop it; you can't make yourself do anything else but that."

—Gore Vidal

From Writer to Publisher...Imajinn That

BY LINDA KICHLINE

AKA CARIN RAFFERTY

Owner & Senior Editor, *Imajinn Books*

From childhood I dreamed of being a writer. Never once did I dream of becoming a publisher. But in December 1998, I founded Imajinn (pronounced Imagine) Books, and in October 1999 we launched our first three romance books. By the end of 2000, we'll have published a total of sixteen books.

I love reading and writing romances with supernatural, paranormal, futuristic, reincarnation, and time travel elements. When these types of books began to disappear off the bookshelves, I was disappointed. I also heard the same complaints from several readers. I'm not sure when I came up with the idea to start publishing these types of books, but when I did, I started running reader surveys to determine what types of books they were interested in reading in this subgenre.

By the time I decided that I really was going to start the business, I had to learn an entirely new aspect of the publishing world—dealing with printers. I decided the best way to do that was to write and publish a book that would take me through the process from beginning to end, so I wrote *The Writer's Guide to Critique Groups*. But even this project didn't begin to cover all the problems that you can run into when printing a book—and every one of those problems are expensive.

My next new foray into the publishing world was soliciting and

editing manuscripts. We were thrilled with the quality manuscripts that came in from the beginning. I'd sworn that we would be a company who'd respond on a manuscript within three months, but I soon found out that would be impossible. We were flooded with submissions. Luckily, we had some excellent readers to help with the reading, but we still found ourselves unable to read all the manuscripts within a few months. Eventually, we had to stop accepting submissions and solicit only specific types of manuscripts in the areas in which our inventory is low. We're finally catching up, but it's taken us six months to do so. Through all of this, I've developed a deep respect for editors. I've personally experienced their workload, and your day is never done.

Of course, we were also learning to work with distributors and bookstores, setting up a web site, and a million other details. If I'd realized just how much work was involved in this business, I'm not sure I'd have taken it on.

We're close to celebrating our first anniversary, and I don't regret becoming a publisher. Two of our first five books—*Dreamsinger* and *Time of the Wolf*—were nominated for the PEARL award, and *Time of the Wolf* won the RIO 1999 Dorothy Parker Award. Nancy Gideon's two vampire romances, *Midnight Enchantment* and *Midnight Gamble* have been on Amazon.com's Bestseller Horror List for ten straight weeks, and it looks like they'll be on the list for a while longer.



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enjoyed the experience.

Book Bandits

If you've been following the Napster flap, you'll be interested in this. The website #Bookwarez offers links to sites offering free copies of e-books to consumers. Among the titles available: *Angela's Ashes*, *Harry Potter* books, *Red Storm Rising* and *The Green Mile*.

The books' publishers say they're investigating.

Governor Vetoes Bill

California Governor Gray Davis has vetoed a bill requiring online retailers to collect sales taxes if they have brick-and-mortar stores or warehouses in the state.

The bill would have required B&N.com and Borders.com, among others, to charge sales tax, erasing a price advantage for e-tailers. Davis says he took the action because he did not want to stifle e-commerce.

Agent-Author Suit

Best-selling author Dave Eggers, (*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*), has been sued by his former agent, Elyse Cheney of Sanford J. Greenburger Associates.

Cheney, whom Eggers fired after his book was published, alleges that her deal with the author requires him to give her a percentage of all revenues earned from the book, including sub, international, and film rights. Eggers, e-interviewed by the Harvard Advocate, wrote that Hollywood wanted to make a movie of his book, that he was probably going to allow it, and that he would likely be paid a lot of money.

Cheney's contention that she is entitled to a portion of



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▶▶▶▶ all future earnings related to the book is based on the standard agency clause in book contracts, which says that the agent is entitled to a portion of all money paid by the publisher to the author. Although such contracts with publishers typically don't specify film rights, Eggers's contract with Simon & Schuster does.

Eggers's attorney Bill Dahill said that Cheney's agreement with Eggers is unenforceable because the deal was signed by Eggers and the publisher but not by Cheney's agency.

"The best that they can claim is the theory of being a third-party beneficiary to the agreement," Dahill said.

Editor No-Goes

You may have read elsewhere that Ann Leslie Tuttle, an associate editor who has been with Silhouette Books since 1997, has left the company. Not so, she says emphatically. She is now acquiring for Steeple Hill's Love Inspired line and Harlequin Historicals. She will continue to acquire contemporaries for all the Silhouette lines and Harlequin Duets, Intrigue and American Romance.

Also, Carrie Feron, executive editor at Avon, denies rumors that she is moving to Pocket Books. "There is no moving van here," she says.

Comics Relief

Idiosyncratic comics genius Ben Katchor, creator of Julius Kniple, real estate photographer, recently won a MacArthur Fellowship. Pantheon, his publisher, has jumped in to pump up comics as books by publishing

Continued on page 18 ▶▶▶▶

From Writer to Publisher...Imajinn That

▶▶▶▶ *Midnight*

Enchantment was nominated as one of the best paranormal covers by *All About Romance* in 1999, and it came in at sixth place, which is great when you consider we were up against all the big publishing houses.

Becoming a publisher isn't a career move I'd recommend for most writers. I've been so involved in running the business that I haven't had time to write myself, and I really miss writing. You work six to seven days a week, and it's not unusual to put in a 14-16 hour day. You have to deal with all the elements that come with running your own business, which is a full-time job in itself. You have to be able to reject authors, and that is the hardest part of the job for me. You have to be willing to financially invest heavily because your income comes in spurts, and in the case of distributors, you can't be certain that sales are final. You'll often get returns only days before

you're expecting a check.

It's a hard, demanding business, but I do have one great benefit—I get to read a lot of wonderful books before anyone else.

Imajinn This

Imajinn Books will be listed in the *2001 Writers Digest Books Novel and Short Story Market* and has met requirements to qualify as an RWA recognized publisher, according to Linda Kichline, publisher.

Imajinn Books was founded in December 1998, and launched its first romance novels in October 1999. The company publishes romances with paranormal, supernatural, futuristic, reincarnation, and fantasy elements. They're also starting a children's fantasy and science fiction line of books.

Information about Imajinn can be found on their website, <http://www.imajinnbooks.com>.

FAST TRACK.....

Due to the number of NINC authors making the Fast Track list every month we're playing with a new format for the column. Numbers in parentheses beside the author's name show how many titles the author has on the USA Today list. Stay tuned for further developments.

USA Today Bestseller list for Sept. 2000

Catherine Anderson
Madeline Baker
Elizabeth Boyle
Sandra Brown [2]
Jayne Castle
Catherine Coulter [2]
Geraldyn Dawson
Janet Evanovich

Patricia Gaffney
Kay Hooper
Linda Lael Miller
Mary Jo Putney
J.D. Robb/Nora Roberts [5]
Meryl Sawyer
Barbara Dawson Smith

Ask the Agent

(Ed's note: Several members on Ninlink asked Ninc prez, Carla Neggars, to submit a composite of some very frank views and ideas on agent practices expressed by a few members on Ninlink to Ninc's Association of Authors' Representatives liaison, Steve Axelrod. Steve has graciously consented to answer our questions, but emphasizes that his answers are his opinions alone, and he is, in this case, not serving as AAR's spokesperson. Ninc has no position on the ideas and opinions proposed herein.)

Authors' Question:

I've thought for a long time that the commission paid to agents in the literary business is not commensurate with the service they provide, for this reason: They continue to earn 10 or 15 percent of your income from a book *long after they're no longer your agent*. So here's my suggestion: in the agency clause in your contract, it should state that an agent gets his commission for *five years* following publication of the book and thereafter *so long as s/he remains your agent*. Once the five years is up, if the agent no longer represents you, *all royalties go to the author*.

My rationale here is that while an agent deserves to be paid for negotiating a contract and representing you with the publisher if there are problems during production of the book, once that agent ceases to represent you, s/he is *no longer earning that money*. The agent will have been amply paid for his/her effort in the first five years of royalty earnings.

If a book ends up getting reprinted six or seven or eight years later, and the agent hasn't represented you for five or six years, it's likely you got reprinted not from the efforts of that agent, but from your own efforts or the efforts of a subsequent agent.

Also, if that "lame duck" agent is earning the money from that reprint, your current agent rarely wants to get involved if there are problems with the reprint, and your "lame duck" agent will argue "I'm no longer your agent."

Why I Think Agents Will Hate This: They won't get paid anymore when we let them go for not representing us in a way we believe they should.

Why Agents May Find This Idea Interesting: That 15% might not go into your own pocket for very long. *You could offer it to your current agent to help you make sure those backlist books are well represented.*

Why I Think This Benefits Authors: Agents won't be able to quit working once the book is published. If they want future royalties, they have to keep doing a good job for you. Also, if you've left an agent, you can offer this money to a new agent who can represent you for backlist books. Or, you can keep the money yourself, if you no longer have an agent representing you and you choose not to hire another agent to represent you.

I don't know how things work with agents in the movie/TV business where there are residuals. I assume they get the money ad infinitum. I just wanted to suggest there might be a better way.

Also, why don't [agents] require some sort of license? Brokers have licenses. Accountants are licensed. Lawyers have licenses. Why not agents, who deal in legal contracts and accounting and broker deals? At least then you'd have a place to go where you could make complaints (can AAR sanction its members?) and stop an agent who's in trouble before so many people get hurt. Also, they'd be trained to know certain minimum information.

I've had two agents "slip in" a clause in the agency agreement in the contract with the publisher to make them the agent for the "option book"—which means the option book under the contract, which they have no right to represent unless they're still working for you. All you have to do is *cross out the clause and initial it* before you send the contract back to the publisher. The contract is between you and the publisher—your agent's initials are not necessary to change that clause.

I've also had an agency "slip in" a clause in the publishing contract that said, "this agency clause shall survive the termination of the contract." In essence, that's a clause that makes your agent the agent for the life of the copyright of the book (in other words, forever). Again, if you see this clause *cross it out and initial it*. Your agent is *not* entitled to be the agent for the life of the copyright of the book.

In *neither case* did the agent (who supposedly represents my interests with the publisher) inform me of what they had put in the contract or how that clause would affect my agency agreement with them. Nor did I confront either agent and say "Nanny nanny boo boo." I just crossed out the clause and we all pretended they hadn't tried to take egregious advantage of me.

► ► ► ►

Ask the Agent

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Authors have to be careful.* My experience is that too many agents are aware of our ignorance and take advantage of it.

Steve Axelrod's Response:

I will gladly reply to your out-takes from Ninlink, but I want to emphasize that in this case, I am responding as an individual agent and *not* as AAR's spokesperson.

As an individual agent with long experience in the genre marketplace (and, again, *not* as AAR's spokesperson) I want to point out to Author A that notwithstanding any of the business arguments agents make in defending their commission structures, the real reason I doubt any agents will agree to her proposal is because we just don't have to. Why don't we feel we have to? Start by asking why the overwhelming majority of agents are now charging their clients 15%, when 10% used to be the standard.

The answer that springs to my mind (and not to the collective mind of the AAR, which cannot set commissions for its members and will not comment on the subject) is that literary agents have seen that there is virtually no resistance to raising commissions by 50% and so they have done it. And, what's worse, as a 10% holdout (up until recently, that is—I'm now charging new clients 15%), I found that in actual practice, it gave me absolutely no competitive advantage to underprice my competition by a huge margin.

The reasons for this are a little hard to pin down with any confidence—what people do and why they say they do it are frequently two different things— but the fact itself is pretty striking. Writers just don't shop for agents based on price. No matter what they say after the fact, price is not very high on their list when choosing a new agent.

Which makes after-the-fact complaints about lesser issues ring a little hollow to my ear and why I think that such calls for change are guaranteed to fail.

Author A's post calling for licensing literary agents (a plan which, by the way, would directly and indirectly raise the cost of operating an agency and probably result in even higher commissions....) mentions a practice that I personally think deserves examination by the AAR: agency clauses that entitle the agent to commission the option book.

Anyone wanting to make a formal complaint should write to AAR Ethics Committee chair Arnold Goodman (Goodman Associates, 500 West End Avenue, NY, NY 10024) with the specifics (including a copy of a the clause itself). Or you can write or fax me (49 Main Street, PO Box 357, Chatham, NY 12037, fax: 518-392-2944) and I'll send it along to the Ethics Committee.

Similarly, anyone wanting to formally take issue with an agency agreement or agency clause that extends to future resales of a book should forward the specifics to Arnold or me for consideration by the Ethics Committee.

S.A.

MEMBER NEWS.....

Romance and Politics

When the *New York Times* wanted a woman's take on the passionate and somewhat controversial kiss exchanged between presidential candidate Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, at the National Democratic Convention, who could have been a more appropriate choice for the honor of writing the op-ed piece than bestselling author Nora Roberts, who has written 135 romance novels?

Not surprisingly, Roberts was enthusiastic in her admiration for Al Gore's romantic gesture. While she does not express the opinion in her op-ed piece that

women will vote for the candidate purely on the basis of that kiss, Roberts went on to say that women who have been shown "the heart" of the candidate may "pay more attention to Mr. Gore's words because of that quick, endearing and romantic impulse."

Also not surprisingly, Roberts reports that she got a lot of very positive feedback from the op-ed piece.

"Interesting to me," she said in e-mail. "Most (positive comments came) from women who apparently had the same reaction to the whole thing as I did. ... So the guy kissed his wife. It's okay. LOL."

This is the first

Continued on page 16 ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

Online.....

I want to thank Peggy Moreland for telling me about www.asdalbooks.com, the website for *Asdal Builders, L.L.C.* Why would I care about a builder's website? Because Bill Asdal offers *Todd's Country Homes and How to Save Money*, a reprinting of a book published in 1868 by "a practical man," Sereno Edwards Todd. Asdal has made the book available because of his appreciation for the history of building and builders. With postage, the 656-page hardback costs \$45.45. Among some of the offerings are various types of homes, ventilation, and instructions for building a log cabin. It also branches into livestock with a discussion of horses, cows, sheep, pigs, and poultry. I've only browsed the pages, but have found what I've read fascinating.

Research

DefenseLink hosted by the Department of Defense at www.defenselink.mil/faq/pis/14.html provides information about the Medal of Honor, including its history. Since 1861, 3,400 medals have been awarded. "The citations highlighting these acts of bravery and heroism" are available at the site. I found it interesting that many medals awarded during the Civil War involved capturing or rescuing a flag or "colors." Some were also awarded to flag bearers. The citations for WW II are much more detailed. All the ones I read were fascinating as they identified valor.

For Relaxation

Terey shared this site with us. "At officeworkout.com, there are Real Player workouts that can be done in the office. If you don't have Real Player on your computer, there's a link for the free download at the site. There's also an electronic reminder to do the exercises."

Need a good laugh? Visit *3BP.com* at www.3bp.com/index.htm where you will see a billboard advertising a dinosaur shaft, an ad for poopy seed bagels, and an assortment of humorous headlines, articles, and photos taken from actual news stories. The bloopers will tickle your funny bone—and encourage you to read your manuscript one more time before sending it off.

This is True at www.ThisIsTrue.com/ shares bizarre—yet true—articles collected by columnist Colorado humorist Randy Cassingham. Highlights include a man who sued his doctor because he lived longer than the doctor predicted and a woman who keeps her husband's ashes in a timer so he can continue to be helpful around the kitchen.

Research Your Next Book Automatically with Intelligent Software

(Reprinted with permission from *The Rock* online magazine at www.paintedrock.com/ and the author Greg Spence, *Get Published! Online Website* at www.getpub.com)

All online research will involve you finding resources you need and then bookmarking them in your browser, so you don't have to search for them again! Inevitably many of your resources will be websites, some of which are dedicated to your chosen field.

In a previous article (<http://www.getpub.com/report19.htm>) I discussed how you can find sites of interest for your research. Once you have located them the next step is to monitor them on a regular basis so that you are kept up to date with any changes the webmaster for the site may make. These updates could provide you with more valuable information. That's fine, I hear you say, but how do I do it?

Well you could do it the hard way and visit each site on a daily or weekly basis just in case something has changed. Obviously this method is very time consuming and I am sure you have better things to do with your valuable writing time! An easier way would be to receive an email from a site when it has changed. Some webmasters provide this capability from their website by providing a box where you can put your email address. The webmaster will then email you when a change has been made. Some webmasters are more reliable than others at informing their visitors of changes, and not all webmasters provide this functionality at their sites.

There are other ways. Use intelligent software bots. What? You do not know what a bot is? Let me tell you. The word "bot" is short for "robot" which implies that they are able to do something for you at your command. This really is the essence of what they do.

Bots, or intelligent agents, as they are also known, can help you with all sorts of mundane online tasks. There are bots that will scour online news sites looking for news about your specialist topic and when they find some they send it to your email address! Other bots are able to help you surf the Net more intelligently and will even suggest sites that may be of interest to you! The bots we are interested in are those that can monitor websites and email us when either a website changes or a new website covering our subject area appears on the Net! Wow! That can save us an immense amount of time.

Well the good news is that it is very easy to find these bots and to use them. You do not have to be a technological wiz kid to get these beauties going! First of all you need to find them and learn all about their capabilities before deciding on which bot to use. To do this you must visit <http://www.botspot.com>, which is the definitive place for locating any type of bot on the Net. This site has a lot of information about bots including what they can do for you and, more importantly, where you can find them.

The bots we are interested in here, and the ones I use most extensively, are the web surfing bots. I use two, "The Informant" and the "NET-HAPPENINGS" bot. ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

Online.....

Using The Informant

The Informant is an agent that will use the search engines to find websites that cover your chosen topic. It will then email you with details of the number of new websites it has found together with other websites that have been updated since you last visited them. This information is invaluable because it avoids you having to search the Net manually.

To use the Informant go to <http://informant.dartmouth.edu> and sign-up, it is FREE! You will then be asked to specify the keywords that describe the topic you are interested in. You can also specify particular website addresses (URLs) that you want monitored.

Using Net-Happenings

NET-HAPPENINGS is an email announcement list of new websites. When new sites come online this agent emails you. To sign up, go to <http://scout18.cs.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/lwgate/NET-HAPPENINGS/> and leave your email address. You cannot target specific topics with this list, so you may have to filter out a lot of irrelevant sites, but it is still worth signing up for. While you're there, it is also worth signing up for the Ezine notification list as well. This list will email you when new Ezines are registered with them.

To sign up, go to: <http://scout18.cs.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/lwgate/NEWSLTR/>

Summary

It is important to be informed of the latest online developments in your subject area. What I have covered in this article are ways in which you can use software bots to make this job easier. I hope this helps you. Thanks for reading.

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If you want to know more about the Ninclink, you can go to www.egroups.com/group/NINCLINK. At the site, you can subscribe and set your preferences (digest, individual posts, etc.).

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

—Lorraine Heath (LorraineHe@aol.com)

MEMBER NEWS.....

▶▶▶ Continued from page 14

time Roberts has done an op-ed for *The New York Times*. *Time Magazine* asked her to do one earlier this year on the "Who Wants to Marry A Millionaire" issue.

Roberts's current books are *Tears of the Moon* and *Sacred Sins*.

A Change of House

Vicki Hinze is pleased to report that she has signed a two-book contract with Bantam Dell for two suspense novels. "They're excited and I'm excited," she said.

Hinze describes the books as "suspense; the first, political suspense with a romantic element. The second is undecided at this time but will be similar in scope and content, I imagine."

"I'm a very goal-oriented writer," she said. "Each November I prepare what my agent and I call my 'Dream

Sheet.' It's what I want to accomplish in the coming year, and in the next five years. Without knowing my Dream Sheet existed, Bantam offered me my Five-Year Plan."

Hinze describes the books she's done most recently for St. Martin's Press as military thrillers/romantic suspense. The first book she'll write for Bantam will have a political setting rather than a military one, and the emphasis is on the suspense."

Hinze's current books are *All About Writing To Sell*, published in July 2000; and *All Due Respect*, which will be published in October 2000. One of her 1999 titles, *Acts Of Honor* was awarded the Maggie Award for Excellence at the recent Moonlight and Magnolias conference by the Georgia Romance Writers for best contemporary novel of the year.

Continued on page 20 ▶▶▶▶



THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

"True Believer"

Okay, that does it, I think I'm finally ready to become a lesbian.

Now, I've never had much sympathy for lesbians, because no matter what sort of prejudice they encounter, I continue to believe, from personal experience and lifelong observation, that no one knows the suffering, the frustration, and the hopeless confusion of a heterosexual woman.

If you're a heterosexual woman, you already know what I mean. If you're a man, you never will. And if you're a lesbian, count your blessings, chick.

Anyhow, according to a recent study done by some research team and then reported on National Public Radio, only about 1/3 of American men wash their hands after they go to the bathroom.

Even if these statistics are a bit skewed, this somehow seems like the last straw to me. Enough is enough, and I've decided I want to be a lesbian. If anyone knows of some pills or shots which could help my hormones stop responding to the male of the species, please get in touch with me.

This option (lesbianism) might never have occurred to me, except that there've been a lot of lesbians in the entertainment headlines lately. Melissa Etheridge and her longtime female partner have recently split up. (And I have all of Etheridge's CDs. I love the gutsy, earthy sexuality of her love songs. See? I am ideal lesbian material!) An even more highly-publicized break-up this year was that of Hollywood's so-called lesbian power couple, Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche. And I must say, the parting of that couple genuinely shocked me, and also reminded me of why I write fantasy and romance novels.

Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche were so intensely paparazzi'd as a couple that even *I* knew about them. Not until long after everyone else knew about them, of course, but I eventually caught on. They first entered my limited awareness zone when stories circulated about the two of them possibly firing their publicists and abandoning Hollywood, accompanied by assertions that they felt their careers were being hurt because of negative attitudes about their sexuality.

I recognized Anne Heche at that time because I had recently seen her kissing Harrison Ford in tropical paradise (in *Six Days, Seven Nights*)—so I was understandably bewildered by what she could possibly think was wrong with her life. I also knew there was a lot of publicity and speculation around the cancellation of Ellen DeGeneres's TV show... but I had watched it twice and then never returned. I didn't find the show funny or entertaining, so I thought it was at least possible that weak writing and lack of audience were factors in its cancellation.

Okay, in all fairness, I don't know what the ratings were, or what the politics in Hollywood are, or how these two women's distinctly public private lives affected their careers. And, not being all that interested in the career tribulations of movie stars, I didn't give them another thought.

However, while watching TV one night, I happened to catch the final ten minutes of an interview with Anne Heche, which was evidently scheduled to promote a soon-to-be-aired cable movie (*If These Walls Could Talk 2*) which she and DeGeneres had worked on together. And what Heche said fascinated me.

I didn't know this (and maybe you didn't either), but Heche was heterosexual when she met DeGeneres. She said that she was so taken with this extraordinary person, so utterly and thoroughly convinced that this was the person she was meant to spend the rest of her life with, that the sexuality issue was irrelevant to her. She didn't see a gender (she said), she saw a person and fell in love with that person.

The interview briefly digressed into some stuff about how Heche was stunned that the gender issue seemed to matter to everyone *else* (yeah, right, as if there was ever any doubt the media would gobble up this relationship as if it were my mother's kuchen bread); but then the discussion returned to her conviction that she had undergone this complete shift in her sexual identity because Ellen was the love of her life, and they would be together forever.

I admit, I was pretty riveted by that. I even made plans to watch their movie... but that would have required me to actually locate my cable guide and find out when it was on, and somehow the effort became too daunting and I never did it.

However, I did think about Heche's comments several times thereafter, genuinely moved by the tale she had related. I mean, isn't this the heart of great love stories—that no obstacle is too great to overcome when soulmates finally find each other? Juliet wasn't going to let Romeo's being a Montague stand in the way of their love. Rhett wasn't going to let Ashley Wilkes, or several husbands, or even the Civil War keep him from having Scarlet. And Heche wasn't going to let gender interfere with the love of her life. (I admit, biologically, I was baffled by that; but philosophically, I found it entralling.)

Isn't what Heche described, in fact, the very essence of what romance writers explore in their novels? Characters who must confront problems, enact changes, and make choices in their external and their internal lives in order to accommodate the most important opportunity and fulfilling experience of their lives—namely, finding true love? And aren't Heche and DeGeneres (I thought to myself) also *who* ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 12

several critically acclaimed comics artists and sending them on book tours.

Pantheon book designer Chip Kidd said they'd like to publish more. "If someone has a great comics story, I'm open to it. We're really interested in long sustained narratives," he said.

I wasn't there, but I picture his words coming out in a balloon over his head.

Stephen King

In an interview in *USA Today*, Stephen King commented on his e-publishing efforts. Reporter Bob Minzesheimer asked him if a writer as popular as Stephen King needs a publisher anymore.

"The more time you take to do this other stuff, the less time you have to actually write. And that's what I enjoy doing—writing. I don't want to be a full-time entrepreneur," said King.

King said that the overall honor system pay-through for those downloading his serialized novel *The Plant* from his website is 75 percent. It dropped from 88 percent for the first installment to 69 percent for the second.

Check Heart Rate

Heart Rate Reviews is a brand new online review site dedicated totally to the romance genre and traditional print published authors.

Noting that many review sites bash authors and their books if the reviewers aren't happy with what they read, friends Camille Tuscadero, Jacquelyn Stone, and Marilee Caine have started a review site where romance authors will get respect and support. The result is Heart Rate Reviews ~ The Pulse of Romance.

▶ ▶ ▶



THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶

romance writers write about? Not mundane "this person will make a comfortable spouse, so let's get married" couples, but passionate "I'll move mountains, make sacrifices, and pursue this with relentless courage, because nothing else matters as much as this love" couples.

Right there, in this celebrity couple whom I had always ignored, was precisely such a grand, passionate, and gutsy love story. I mean, talk about a strong internal and external conflict! Being a straight person who suddenly falls powerfully and irrevocably in love with someone of your own gender! Wow. I, who have plotted numerous love stories in two genres, would never have thought of that conflict—and it's a powerful one, particularly given social ramifications which are at least as daunting as the more traditional conflicts of (for example) "my soulmate is my blood enemy" or "my soulmate is of a different social class."

Although it didn't seem to be a big deal to Heche when she gave that interview, I thought it was a tremendous testimony to love that, upon meeting the soulmate whose gender didn't coincide with her heterosexuality, this woman completely changed her sexual identity. I thought it represented enormous courage, precisely the kind which romance protagonists are supposed to discover in themselves, that she chose to defy public opinion (and possibly family harmony) in favor of being true to her heart, in all its rich capacity and surprising horizons.

I thought this was really cool.

Okay, yeah, I also knew there could be more to it (or less to it) than that, but one of the skills you develop as a writer is to know when to leave the story alone, to recognize when it's j-u-s-t right. And the story I was left with after that interview was just right.

So I was disappointed... yes, even shocked when DeGeneres and Heche split up only a few months later. Genuine outrage followed fast upon the heels of my shock—when I learned that this couple had been together for less than four years.

I was flabbergasted. This enormous life-altering love had lasted... not even four years? I have a \$17 pair of sandals that's lasted longer than that -- and *I'm* hard on shoes.

Doesn't it seem like the love of one's life, the soulmate for whom one changed one's sexual identity, the person one was destined to be with forever... Doesn't it seem like that should last longer than a \$17 pair of sandals?

Well, what do I know about these people? Maybe their highly public lives created problems and pressures which even a great love couldn't withstand. Or maybe it wasn't such a great love, after all. Maybe it was a pretty typical affair, even a mundane one, romanticized by its participants for the benefit of the press. I don't know, and now I don't care.

I just believe in enduring love, and I like to see it confirmed from time to time. That's not the romance writer in me. That's *me*—and that *me* is what makes it possible for me to be a good romance writer.

I also believe in (and occasionally need reassuring confirmation of) terrible courage, passionate commitment, and unassailable loyalty. I need to believe in sacrifice and redemption, in the heroic inside of each of us, in the cause for which it is worth dying, in the love for which it is worth living, in the war worth winning, and in the peace worth sacrificing for. Needing to believe in these things is what makes me a good fantasy writer.

I need to believe in all of this, yet I am daily confronted with a world where half of all marriages end in divorce, where wars are complex economic endeavors

bearing no relation to the noble ideals so cynically used to promote them to the taxpaying public, and where people often say "I love you" merely to grease the wheels rather than as an expression of profound commitment.

I'd like to believe that there are occasionally national leaders who are moral and brave, who fight for ideals and fearlessly oppose wrong-doers (no matter *how* big the campaign contribution). I want to believe there are religious leaders whose lives evoke the essence of the faiths they profess. I need to believe that a good person reaps the karma of good deeds, and that a bad person gets what's coming to her. Above all, I need to believe that the world is a mysterious, surprising, magical, glamorous, heart-wrenching, tragic, glorious, wildly amusing place where anything can still happen.

So I feel really cheated, even outraged, when someone confirms something I need to believe in... and then pulls the rug out from under my feet. I'm sure celebrity is a terrible burden, and I realize that Anne Heche doesn't need me picking on her like this; but she had no business convincing me of her great love story if she wasn't willing to endure the consequences of such a rash act. I can't claim to care about her as a person, but I do care about what she made me believe in the day she described the life-altering love she had discovered upon meeting her soulmate, and I frankly resent her for letting me down. (Never fear, I'll get over it.)

Which is what's wonderful and, I now realize, genuinely important about popular fiction. It's written by believers for believers about believers. It reaffirms that it's okay for me to need to believe in the things I need to believe in, and it assures me that other people out there need to believe in them, too—despite the daily assaults which the real world launches against these beliefs.

When you pick up a romance novel, you know that *these* lovers really will make an enduring commitment. When you open a mystery novel, you can count on the detective bringing the killer to justice; and you know the killer won't become the darling of the talk show circuit after getting off on a technicality. The reader of a fantasy novel can count on good ultimately triumphing over evil, whatever the cost, because true heroism is inherently stronger and more enduring than villainy.

Popular fiction is like a homeopathic treatment of the soul. As long as you keep verifying for yourself that lasting love, true courage, and real justice do indeed exist, you can prevent the ignominy which also exists from taking over your system and making you toxic. The petty, the mundane, and the disappointing in our world have been recorded since mankind first began writing; fortunately, though, so have the basic themes of heroism, justice, and love which are, in our era, still affirmed in the pages of popular fiction.

So it's a pretty worthwhile profession we have, a constant vocation to assure true believers that fleeting love, petty cowardice, and miscarriages of justice are not (despite occasional appearances to the contrary) the standards by which we should measure ourselves, others, or the world we live in. Our standards should always be high, because no matter how distant the stars we reach for, they are attainable. We, as popular fiction novelists, imagine this, and it's our job to make others believe whatever we imagine.

Anne Heche, a total stranger I know virtually nothing about, made me believe in her grand love for a little while, and I resented her for disappointing me. However, a page of life is certainly much harder to make j-u-s-t right than a page of fiction, so I should cut her some slack. She may really have believed the things she said on national TV before the end of her not-so-lifelong-after-all relationship; in which case, she may even need a few good books to read right now. Happily, our job is making sure a few good books exist out there for someone who needs to believe in enduring love when her own hasn't endured.

Now if I could just believe that the next attractive man whom I meet always washes his hands after going to the bathroom...

— **Laura Resnick**



BREAKING NEWS

Heart Rate considers authors their greatest asset and offers free promotion. You can check the site out at <http://www.hearttraterreviews.com>.

HRR is currently accepting current and upcoming releases for review. They also accept books published within the last 12 months. To request a review, complete the online request form found on the website.

They offer the Heart Beat Award for romance novels that stand head and shoulders above the rest. Every romance novel awarded the Heart Beat Award by staff reviewers becomes eligible for nomination of The Heart Beat Best of the Best Award. A list of Best of the Best nominees will be announced January 10, 2001. Winners will be announced Valentine's Day, February 14, 2001.

Other features are interviews, a writer's nook, online bulletin board, chats, and free promotional materials.

Barenaked Chutzpah

In the midst of all the whooping and hollering about Napster's giving away free music, the Canadian band Barenaked Ladies has quietly managed to smuggle some of their recordings into the Napster system. They sound like songs, but they're actually just ads for their next album.

If you can't get rid of it, you might as well use it to your advantage, right?

Pamela Browning has written for Harlequin, Silhouette, Mills & Boon and Berkeley. Her short non-fiction and fiction for adults and teenagers has been published in many national and regional publications.

MEMBER NEWS.....

Continued from page 16

Bookseller Award

Most Wanted, a Silhouette Intimate Moments by Maggie Price, won first place in the Romantic Suspense category of the Booksellers' Best Award, a national contest judged exclusively by booksellers. A color poster displaying the covers of the winning entries in all categories has been sent to over a thousand booksellers across the country.

Price's current books are *Dangerous Liaisons*, Silhouette Intimate Moments, November, 2000; and "Midnight Seduction," which will appear in the Silhouette Intimate Moments 3-in-1 anthology, *Special Report*.

Angels on the Way

Bonnie Jeanne Perry's short story "String of Pearls" will appear in the *Guardian Angels* anthology from Cumberland House Publishing. "String of Pearls" is the story of a young girl growing up in Oakland, California, during World War II.

Guardian Angels is a November 2000 release edited by Martin H. Greenberg who has edited more than one thousand anthologies.

Book of Her Heart

Cynthia Pratt (aka Lynn Bailey) won the PASIC Book of Your

Heart contest in the Paranormal Division with *Shame the Devil*, a paranormal historical romance.

Affaire De Coeur Magazine's Reader/Writer Poll for 2000 named *Magic By Daylight* by Cynthia Pratt (w/a Lynn Bailey) Best Supernatural/Sci-Fi Romance. *Magic By Daylight* is a Jove Magical Love romance, published by Berkley Jove, Editor Gail Fortune. Pratt's most recent book is *Splendid You*, also a Jove Magical Love.

Books on Tape

Vella Munn's mainstream manuscript, *Whiteout* will be produced as a book on tape and pod (print on demand) by FictionWorks and as an e-book by Hard Shell, this fall.

Munn recently agreed to let a new e-publisher bring out a previously published book to which she recently received the rights. In addition, Books In Motion has agreed to produce three more of Munn's historicals in tape form.

Maggie Winner

Teresa Medeiros's April, 1999, release, *Charming The Prince*, was awarded the Maggie Award for Excellence at the recent Moonlight and Magnolias conference by the Georgia Romance Writers for Best Historical. In addition, her April 1998 release, *Nobody's Darling*, was

just chosen as one of the "200 All-Time Favorite Romances" by *Romantic Times* magazine.

Medeiros's current book, *The Bride and the Beast*, is now available in hardcover from Bantam Books.

Hooper Makes the NYT List

Kay Hooper recently made her debut on the *New York Times* Bestseller List with her latest book, *Stealing Shadows*. Hooper has served as NINC's advocacy chair for two years.

Cinderella Story

Kathryn Jensen's most recent Silhouette Desire title, *Mail-Order Cinderella*, September 2000, hit Waldenbooks #1 spot on the Romance Bestseller list for the weeks ending September 16 and 23. At the same time, the novel debuted on USA Today's Top 300 books in the #126 position.

Two additional Desires, *The Earl's Secret* and *The American Earl* are scheduled for release in January and February of 2001, with a third novel to be published toward the end of next year. Kathryn Jensen Pearce is currently working on a concept for a new trilogy for Desire.

Send news for this column to Kathy Chwedyk at KChwed@aol.com or 1215 Fairmont Court, Algonquin, IL 60102. Chwedyk, who writes *Regencies for Zebra* as Kate Huntington, has a holiday October release called *Mistletoe Mayhem*.

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