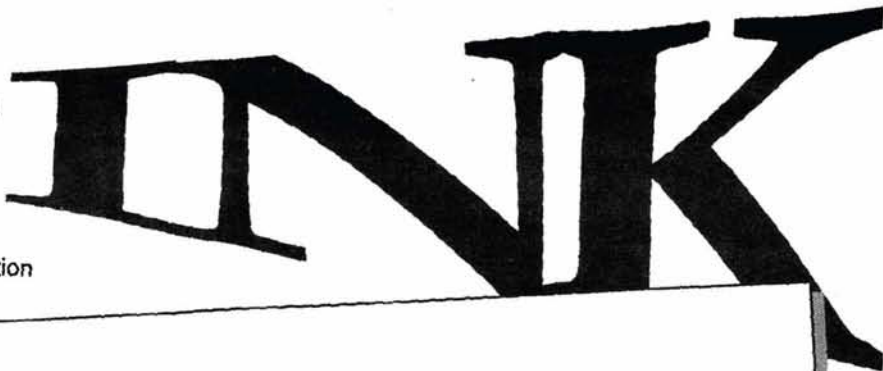


Novelists'



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

NINC URGES AMAZON TO CHANGE POLICY

BY PAMELA BROWNING

The Ninc Board of Directors has issued a statement protesting Amazon.com's "blue-button" policy of posting authors' used books for sale on the same website page where they offer new books. The board collaborated in the drafting of the statement, which it sent to Amazon.com's chief executive officer, Jeffrey Bezos.

In voicing Ninc's objection, our organization joins other writers' groups who have blasted Amazon's policy.

**See Authors Guild Letter
on page 4**

January 8, 2001
Mr. Jeffrey P. Bezos
Chief Executive Officer, Amazon.com
1200 12th Avenue S., Suite 1200
Seattle, WA 98144

Dear Mr. Bezos:

The Novelists Inc. Board of Directors joins with the Authors Guild in objecting to Amazon.com's policy of blatantly promoting used books in direct competition with new book sales. Authors receive no royalties or other financial compensation on these used-book transactions.

Novelists, Inc. is an organization with a membership of over six hundred published authors of popular fiction. It is true that a few very successful and high-profile authors—like high-profile actors, musicians and other artists—make a great deal of money from their work. However, the vast majority of authors need the royalty from every new book sale just to earn a decent living. Amazon.com's flagrant brokering of used books cannot help but diminish our members' income; its ill-conceived decision to become an aggressive purveyor of used books may well result in authors abandoning their writing careers.

We strongly urge Amazon to reconsider this policy, and we heartily endorse the sentiments expressed in the Authors Guild's recent letter to Amazon, the text of which appears below

The Novelists, Inc. Board of Directors
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Patricia Rice, President-Elect
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Linda Kay West, Treasurer
Georgia Bockoven, Advisory Council Representative
Pamela Browning, Newsletter Editor

Research Roadblocks:

History The Way It Wasn't, and Other Obstacles in Writers' Paths (Part 2 of 2)

BY REBECCA BRANDEWYNE

[Editor's note: Last month, historical sleuth Rebecca Brandewyne took us on the circuitous route she traveled while researching her novel, Destiny's Daughter. When we left her, she

was trying to locate Mount Sinai and chasing clues that led her to wonder why the biblical Moses, who was tending Jethro's flocks in Midian, would have driven them out of Midian, around the Gulf of Aqaba, and into the Sinai peninsula to graze them.]

Now, I live in Kansas, and I don't know any cattle ranchers or sheep farmers who move their own herds that far

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Novelists, Inc.

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Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

Ninclink has been alive with chatter about what Ninc's mission is, what its founding principles were and where it should be heading. A lot of Ninc members aren't on the link, however, and this is a discussion that needs to be embraced by the entire membership.

First, a little history. Several people more knowledgeable than I have stated that Ninc was founded primarily to provide networking opportunities for published authors. I believe networking is the most valuable benefit Ninc offers members, but I don't remember that the organization was founded specifically for that purpose.

I was not one of the founders, but I joined within weeks of Ninc's birth. As I recall, the organization was founded by a group of published novelists, many of them members or former members of Romance Writers of America who were dissatisfied with that organization's emphasis on meeting the needs of its unpublished authors. The founders wanted an organization that met *our* needs. Broad, overly general, but that was the concept: an organization devoted to the needs of published novelists.

At our first conference in 1990, we spent a long afternoon shut inside a room at a hotel in Stamford, Connecticut, haggling over exactly what shape we wanted Ninc to take. Someone proposed that we present annual awards for member books; that idea was voted down. We deliberated over how many publishing credits we should require for membership. We decided to keep part of our newsletter private; the white outer pages of *NINK* would be public, and the pastel-hued inner pages would be for members only.

But the bottom line was, whatever Ninc was going to be, it existed *to meet the needs of published authors*.

So, what are those needs? I'm sure they've changed over the past ten years. Let's talk about them.

Ninc is a small organization with a small budget, and we operate under legal constraints related to our non-profit status. We can't afford professional administrators or a staff attorney. But I don't want to restrict our discussion to "can't." I want us to think about "what if."

You're all novelists, so you know how to play the "what if" game. What if Novelists, Inc. could do one thing for you that it's not already doing? What would it be? **Don't limit yourself by being pragmatic.** Don't hogtie your imagination by saying, "Ninc *can't* do that." We're in the "what if" stage now. There will be plenty of time later to shout "Can't!"

I've already heard from one member who said she'd like Ninc to hold two conferences a year: a business-oriented gathering in New York City and a retreat somewhere outside the city. I told her I couldn't see Ninc sponsoring two conferences, given our limited finances and manpower. But what if 90% of the members wanted two conferences a year? What if you wanted them enough to accept a steep increase in dues and an obligatory contribution of labor? Let's find out what members really want before we label anything impossible.

Send your ideas to me at <b.keiler@juno.com>. Keep your e-mails short (and don't expect me to reply individually to them!). This informal survey will give us all an idea of what Ninc might do that it's not already doing, how it can better serve you, and where we want to take this wonderful organization as it enters its second decade of existence.

Remember: Ninc isn't mine. It doesn't belong to the Board, the founders, or the Advisory Council. It belongs to *you*, the members.

— **Barbara Keiler**

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 or e-mail. See masthead for addresses.

Agent Claims Article Draws Another Perspective

I wanted to add some of my thoughts to the discussion regarding agents' inserting language in publishing agreements that entitled them to a commission on option works.

The official A.A.R. response recused themselves from addressing the issue directly, and I would like to offer one agent's direct specific view.

It's an important issue because agency commission and other agency rights are covered both by the agency agreement that is actually signed by the author and agent and by the agency clauses contained in the publishing agreements themselves. It's possible for these two separate contracts to be in conflict.

I believe it is the agent's obligation to make as certain as possible that the author understands the provisions of the agency agreement and the significance of the agency clause contained in the publishing agreement. I certainly believe it is a serious breach of ethics for the commission-on-option-works language to be in a publishing agreement without the agent's making certain that the author understands the significance of that clause. If the agent does believe that he or she should be entitled to a commission on option works, that term of service should be clearly spelled out in the agency agreement itself, and the author should be clearly informed of its significance.

I don't and have never asked for this provision in my agency agreement or in my agency clause that is inserted in all publishing contracts.

That said, the practice does shed some light on the dynamics of the author and agent relationship and I do want to remark on that. It is very hard to quantify the work an agent does and the compensation the agent gets. It's possible to kill yourself developing and marketing a manuscript and have it go unsold or sold for very little money. It's also possible to have something land on your desk, sell almost effortlessly and create very good returns.

Let me just offer two scenarios that could tempt an agent to believe that an option on future books is fair. I

draw both of them from my own experience.

An author came to me with no prospects after publishing about six books in a certain genre. I worked with this author to develop a new book, carefully critiqued it, marketed it to the whole world, and finally found this person a new publisher. A second book followed. I was fired before the author delivered the proposal for the third book, and the author was wonderfully candid about his/her motivation.

I wasn't fired for cause, almost the opposite. I had restarted this person's career and now that he/she foresaw continuing indefinitely with his/her new publisher, there was no reason to keep me around. Though I may have worked hoping to share in the remainder of this person's career, he/she felt two books' commission was adequate. Goodbye, agent. Rescue someone from a pit on Monday, sent packing Wednesday! I confess I tend to laugh about this one incident because the author's cold-blooded candor and calculation was so out of sync with his/her public persona.

The other story is much shorter and more basic, and I won't provide much detail. It's the old one. I found this person in the slush pile, critiqued/edited his/her first book, sold it and about a dozen other novels, finally got this person's career going, then was fired for someone I believe they perceived as "bigger." It hurts to build the foundation of the house only to see someone else enjoying the view from the third floor.

I don't agree that an author should have any obligation to the originating agent on option books, but it's easy for me to put myself in the shoes of an agent who feels otherwise.

— **Ethan Ellenberg**

Make Your Mark on NINK

NINK pays for articles (not letters to the editor). For more information or to propose an article, contact editor Pam Browning (see the masthead for contact listing).

National Writers Union Health Plan

Ninc Members are eligible to join the CSS/NWU health plan at group rates by joining NWU in a non-voting, associate status. The benefit package includes:

- Traditional Dental Coverage
- Doctor Visits/Lab Work/X rays/Vision Coverage
- Fitness Reimbursement/Wellness Care/Maternity
- Infertility Programs

Call 1 (800) 258-3669 for further information.



BREAKING NEWS

COMPILED BY
PAMELA BROWNING

Have They Got a Deal For You

Just when you thought Amazon.com has squeezed every available drop of money out of you, they have a new scheme. Now you can pay money for your book to appear as a top result whenever a specific keyword is searched.

First you buy points in lots of 20,000 for \$20. Then you choose how much you want to bid—per impression—on a particular search term, such as “vultures,” and choose the duration of the promotion. If your bid is highest, the title being promoted—your book, *Picking Us Clean*—will appear as the top listing in a separate left-hand column labeled “Sponsored Results” on the results page. If someone, say the author of a competing title, *Flesh-eating E-Tailers*, has outbid you, your book will be bumped to the next available slot in descending order of bids.

The program appears to offer Amazon.com yet another opportunity to generate more revenue within its site, observes *PW Daily*.

Supremes Consider Freelancers' Plight

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear an appeal by major publishers of a U.S. appeals court decision that freelance writers, artists and photographers are entitled to extra payment when their work is included in electronic databases without their



RESEARCH ROADBLOCKS

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(although perhaps they do)—and naturally, I don't figure that Moses had any pickup trucks or other modern conveniences at his disposal, either. So it doesn't make any sense at all to me that he is, by scholars' reckonings, driving Jethro's flocks way beyond Midian into the Sinai Peninsula. Further, during the Exodus, Moses and the Hebrews were on the run, being chased by the Pharaoh and his army of chariots, and a northern Exodus route into Canaan (the Hebrews' ultimate destination), although indeed supported by some scholars and sources, is extremely unlikely, as it would have meant passage through Philistia, with its hordes of Philistine armies, who were a dangerous menace to the whole region.

So it's far more feasible to me that the southern-Exodus-route supporters

are right, and that Moses and company did head south, taking a roundabout route (which satisfactorily accounted for all that “wandering” they did, besides). Further, if a Pharaoh and his army of chariots were pursuing me, I know I'd personally head just as fast as I could to land I knew like the back of my hand, where I could hope to evade them, and for Moses, that was Midian, where he had lived for years since his self-imposed exile from Egypt, after having killed a man.

So I do some more digging, and I discover a very interesting fact about the Gulf of Aqaba—which is that although it is between (as usual, sources conflict) 3,000 and 5,000 feet deep, it has a submerged, narrow, natural land bridge relatively close to its surface, so that if its waters were suddenly “to part” because of some phenomenon (such as an earthquake or seaquake resulting from a volcanic explosion),

The Author's Guild and Association

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 1

Dear Mr. Bezos:

We are writing on behalf of the more than 8,000 members of the Authors Guild and the 278 member companies of the Association of American Publishers to express our grave concern that Amazon's new method of marketing used copies of recently published titles will significantly harm sales of new copies of those titles.

At the moment, when customers view information about a title on the Amazon Web site, a blue box links users to a screen where they may buy or sell used copies of that title. To encourage them to click on the blue-box link, Amazon informs them of the number of used copies of the work available for sale and of the lowest price available for those copies. With one mouse click, customers depart the new book's screen and enter the used book Marketplace.

Some of the used books now available through Amazon Marketplace Sellers are very recently published titles. A quick

review of the site reveals that used copies of the following works (among what appears to be thousands of others) are available: *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver (published October 17), *Drowning Ruth* by Christina Swartz (published September 27), *Me Talk Pretty One Day* by David Sedaris (published May); *The River King* by Alice Hoffman (published July 13), *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood (published September 5), *The Amber Spyglass* by Philip Pullman (published October 10), and *Winter's Heart* by Robert Jordan (published November 7). For every title not yet available in used form, the blue-box link allows a reader to list it for sale “in 60 seconds.”

As you know, these Marketplace sales earn no payment for the authors and publishers of the books in question. Only the seller and Amazon are paid. These sales are excluded when calculating sales figures for various bestsellers lists, as well as from the publishers' own sales records of their authors' titles. In addition, Amazon does not appear to have taken any precautions

this land bridge would invariably be exposed. I also find out that Jabal-al-Lawz, the highest peak in what was once Midian (now western Saudi Arabia), is even today peculiarly blackened all around its summit (by "a pillar of fire and smoke"? I immediately wonder, of course). So I sketch a crude map and plot a course from Avaris to Jabal-al-Lawz, across the Gulf of Aqaba, via the submerged land bridge.

I already know the Book of Exodus is out of order chronologically, and having by now learned, as well, that contrary to what we may believe, historical timelines are not, in fact, engraved in stone, I simply discount the Bible's Exodus timeline, keeping only the place names: Marah, Succoth, Pi-ha-hiroth, Migdol, Elim, and Baal-zephon.

"Marah" means "bitter," and the Bitter Lakes are on this route. Succoth ("booths") has been identified by archaeologists as the fortress of Tharu (T'aru) or Takut on the shores of the Bitter Lakes. "Pi-ha-hiroth" means

"Mouth of the Gorges," and to reach the beach at the Gulf of Aqaba's submerged land bridge, one must travel through eighteen miles of gorges, only one of which opens up on, or has a "mouth" to, the beach. "Migdol" merely means "watchtower," and it's easy enough for me to envision a fortress and/or watchtower guarding the entrance from the beach to the gorges, and thus to the heart of the Sinai Peninsula—a sensible military precaution, after all, and the Egyptians weren't fools. Elim is described by the Bible as a place of "many springs and palm trees," and lo and behold, the name of the city of Nuweiba, which is today located on this very beach, turns out to mean "bubbling springs," and it is noted not only for these springs, but also for its many groves of palm trees. Baal was not an Egyptian god, but a Baal-zephon, across the Gulf of Aqaba, in Midian, where Baal was worshiped, was quite a likely possibility, I reason. Last but not least, Mount Sinai is also called "Mount Horeb" in the Bible, ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

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approval. Appealing the earlier decisions were *The New York Times*, *Newsday* (The Tribune Co.), *Time* (Time Warner), Lexis/Nexis (Reed Elsevier), and University Microfilms International (Bell & Howell).

The lawsuit, *Tasini v New York Times*, was filed in 1993 by six freelance writers, including National Writers Union president Jonathan Tasini. The appeals court rejected, in a 1999 ruling, the publisher's contention that databases were simply revised versions of the original publications and that they didn't need the author's permission. If the Supreme Court had refused to hear the appeal, the earlier decision would have stood—a positive for the plaintiffs.

A decision is expected by the end of June.

Postage Rates Increase

U.S. postal rates increased on January 7. First-class letters now require a 34-cent stamp. The good news is that the rate for the second ounce of postage has gone down to 21 cents, which means that the rate for heavier first-class mail remains the same.

Priority mail costs have also increased: It's now \$3.50 for one pound and \$3.95 for up to two pounds. (This means that first-class rates will actually be cheaper for one-pound items.)

A one-ounce letter from the U.S. to Canada or Mexico now costs 60 cents; to other countries, 80 cents. (You can order U.S. postage from anywhere in the world at <http://www.stampsonline.com>.)

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of American Publishers letter:

to prevent Marketplace users from selling review copies or other promotional copies not intended for resale.

We understand that Amazon wishes to provide customers with all manner of services including the ability to buy and sell used books. However, as a leader in the bookselling industry, Amazon's sales practices can have a significantly deleterious effect on new book sales. If your aggressive promotion of used book sales becomes popular among Amazon's customers, this service will cut significantly into sales of new titles, directly harming authors and publishers.

We're all in this business together. Without talented authors producing a large number of new titles every year, Amazon's sales will certainly suffer. If book authors and publishers aren't adequately compensated for their work, however, then more and more writers will be compelled to pursue other creative outlets and professions. For the sake of authors, publishers, readers, and Amazon, a compromise must be found that will not

discourage writers from writing or consumers from buying new books.

We believe the compromise is simple and straightforward: restrict the blue-box link to out-of-print and collectible books and list all used-book offerings after all new versions of a title are listed. Our members want nothing more than a fair opportunity to earn royalties for their book sales whatever the sales outlet. We hope that Amazon will respect this very reasonable professional goal.

We are encouraged by your publicly stated commitment not to hurt authors or publishers with your new Marketplace. We welcome the opportunity to discuss other ways to meet that commitment and would be happy to meet with you or your representatives regarding this matter.

Sincerely,
Letty Cottin Pogrebin
President, Authors Guild

Patricia S. Schroeder
President, Association of American Publishers



BREAKING NEWS

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For Your Spirit

Authors and editors are volunteering their time and skills to produce a collection of short fiction in memory of Christin Lamb, slain eight-year-old niece of romance writer Carolyn Lampman. Proceeds from this anthology's publication will benefit the Christin Lamb Foundation, a charitable organization.

Thematic content of the collection will be based on tales of the spirit of hope, love, and redemption. If you would like to participate, check out SWP Submission Guidelines found on the SWP website (www.starpublications.com).

For more information about Christin Lamb or the Foundation established in her honor, you may view her photo at www.clamb.org/. Or you may visit: <http://www.mailbase.ac.uk/lists/seda/1998-07/0014.htm/>

E-Challenge From B&N.com

Barnesandnoble.com plans to launch Barnes & Noble Digital, an electronic publishing imprint that intends to publish thousands of new, out-of-print, public-domain, and original titles in e-book editions over the next few years.

The move slots the e-tailer into a leadership position in the new e-book industry; B&N offers a higher royalty rate to authors, lower-priced e-books, and an extensive Web marketing and sales network.

B&N Digital will pay advances as well as royalties and will offer authors a 35 percent royalty on the retail price of an e-book sold through B&N.com's ▶ ▶ ▶

RESEARCH ROADBLOCKS

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and even today, a gorge known as the "Hurab" winds its way to the foot of Jabal-al-Lawz.

Coincidence?

All sheer coincidence? Personally, I don't think so, and after feeding all this information into my computer, I discover that an amateur archaeologist named Ronald Wyatt had, before his death, been attempting to prove this was, in fact, the actual Exodus route (his own route being, with some variations, more or less the same as mine; see his proposed route at: <http://www.anchorstone.com>). But, again, scholars and sources don't inform us about all of this. Only a single amateur archaeologist, it appears, had set out to question what we have for centuries been told by scholars and our sources—and these are all in disagreement about the Exodus route, besides.

So how on earth am I going to explain all this to my readers, even with an author's note? I wonder. Visions of "correcting" letters about the Exodus route pouring in from Bible-belt fans fill my mind. At the very least, I need a map, I decide, to make all this comprehensible to my readers, and my own crude map is terrible. I don't know how to operate my paint program properly, and every time I rescan my map to try to fix it, it inexplicably gets darker and darker instead.

My Welshman, however, besides being a historian and writer, is quite a talented artist. Blithely I e-mail my entire Exodus chapter and pathetic map off to him and ask sweetly if he will read my chapter, point out to me any errors in the history and my deductive reasoning, and draw me a decent map. My Welshman is not only equally sweetly obliging, but also so meticulous and thorough that he then himself researches maps for the whole region as it looked in 1628 B.C.

I am utterly deflated that I have

been so intent on uncovering a viable, accurate Exodus route, based on all the available evidence, that I have never even once given a single thought as to how the region's landscape might well have changed in over 2,500 years. But since he is so bright and sees instantly what I am after, my Welshman fixes my proposed Exodus route to correspond with the landscape in 1628 B.C. and draws me a gorgeous map (for which map he firmly declines to be paid, announcing, "It is my gift to you, sweetheart.")

All women should be so lucky! Need I say that I am unreservedly delighted that I have him? After all, what copy editor would be apt to know about any of this, much less to spend hours and hours tracking it all down to be sure I have it right, so that I don't look like a total ignoramus in print?

To Ali Baba And Onward...

I then move on to Babylonia c. 587 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar II, and the Tower of Babel ("Bab-El," meaning "Gate of God"). I get this chapter past my Welshman without a single question or correction, so I figure I am now on a roll.

Big mistake. Alas, so much for my ego, wishful thinking, and my so-called expert sources.

For we arrive now at the Arabian Nights. I am resolutely bent on having the fabled Shahryar and Sheherazad as characters in my novel for two reasons: One is that I want to use the tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, and the other is that I want my ancient manuscript's contents to travel all over the globe. I have, because of the previous difficulties with my timeline, already—however reluctantly—given up on the idea of somehow dispatching my puzzle box and my ancient manuscript over to the New World. ("Sweetheart, there is simply no logical way, timewise, that you are going to be able to make that work. You will either have to give up the New World or else give up the Knights Templar, as well as Nicolas Flamel," my Welshman has

told me—and, clearly, I can't do that. My puzzle box and my ancient manuscript are my Knights Templar treasure, and I don't want to ax the alchemist Flamel as a character, either.) But I am not going to give up the Orient, I decide.

Shahryar and his brother, Shahzaman, are the kings of Bukhara and Samarkand, respectively, and this region (roughly modern Uzbekistan) was once the heart of the Silk and Fur Roads, the meeting ground of Rome, Greece, Babylonia, Persia, Parthia, India, and China, among many other lands, whence information from my ancient manuscript could have traveled to the Orient and beyond (perhaps even across the Bering Strait to the New World, I am thinking hopefully, since I've never been one to surrender easily). Historical material on Samarkand and Bukhara, however, is unbelievably sparse and pitiful—and I conjecture, besides, that Richard Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* has the two kings' cities backward, that Shahryar, being the older brother, ought to be ruling the more-important Samarkand, a capital city, instead of Bukhara.

My Untrustworthy Encyclopaedia

Nevertheless, I do my homework and e-mail it off to my Welshman for his input. Despite all my best efforts, however, what I've turned up is so badly documented that, eventually, it necessitates an overseas telephone call. I am compelled also to e-mail copies of all my research for this particular chapter to my Welshman—for the simple reason that he can't believe that what I've found is so misleading and erroneous. Neither can I. But it is. Even my long-trusted encyclopaedia, for which I paid a fortune before the advent of CD and Internet encyclopaedias, is incorrect.

It gives me "Afrasiab" as the ancient name of Samarkand; and "Transoxiana" as the name of the region at this time is also a misnomer, I presently discover. The Transoxiana region was actually divided into three lands in 106 B.C., of which Sogdiana is the only one I need worry about, my Welshman informs me, as Samarkand

was its capital. Further, "Maracanda" was the ancient name of Samarkand, and "Afrasiab" was, in reality, the name of the hill upon which the citadel containing the city's palace stood. In addition, this hill was somewhat unlikely to have been called "Afrasiab" in 106 B.C., since that was the name of the chieftain of the White Huns who overran Sogdiana at a later date, my Welshman tells me, and the hill was probably therefore connected with him in some fashion. I am further treated to the complete history of this entire region under Alexander the Great, the Seleucid Empire, the Persians, the Parthians, the Kushans, and so on, clear up to the advent of Genghis Khan.

I don't know how my Welshman knows all this—much less remembers it all in such great detail right off the top of his head. I hang up the telephone, totally disgusted that sources I've used and trusted for years have now been exposed to me as being untrustworthy, capable of misleading me, and even of providing me with completely inaccurate information and facts. I wonder how in the heck any copy editor in the whole publishing industry would ever have managed the inclination and wherewithal, much less the time, to double-check all this relatively obscure material. I go off to double-check it all myself—amused that my Welshman has now devoted so much time and energy to helping me that he has begun teasingly referring to *Destiny's Daughter* as "his" book! After much time-consuming searching and digging, I do finally run everything down. He's right about it all, of course.

So why didn't my encyclopaedia and other respected sources I routinely employ know all this, too? After all, they hold themselves out to the public as "expert" sources of such information, so they ought—and, indeed, have an obligation—to get it all right! I think indignantly. I mean, if my Welshman and I could track it all down, so could they, obviously! How can I ever trust them again about anything? I wonder, highly discouraged. But still, I manage via the White Huns to trace "Afrasiab" back even further, past the White Hun chieftain named Afrasiab to ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

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eBook Store, higher than any major New York publisher. (Random House recently announced that its e-book royalty rate is 50 percent of the wholesale price of an e-book, which is about 25 percent of retail price.)

B&N Digital will also offer a 50 percent royalty on the wholesale price of its titles that are sold through its 400,000 affiliate Web sites. Unlike publishers who are pricing e-books much the same as their print editions, B&N Digital e-books will be priced from \$5.95 to \$7.95. The e-books will be available in all formats as well as print-on-demand paper books.

The imprint is actively pursuing original e-books. B&N Digital e-books should be available in the spring.

Oh, Drat

Reuters reports that Amazon.com's shopping site racked up the most*online retail Christmas traffic last year. Barnes & Noble's site was Number 4.

Musical Chairs

Beth de Guzman, formerly executive editor at Bantam, began her new position as editorial director of mass market at Warner on January 29.

Amazon Bargain Outlet

Here's another one to push *your* buttons—Amazon.com now has a bargain section called Amazon Outlet that will consolidate and promote bargains from many of the product categories offered on the site, including books. ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶

The site opened on December 28.

The Reef by Nora Roberts is offered at 71 percent off, and Oprah's *Make the Connection* at 68 percent off.

Curt Anderson, manager of Amazon Outlet, when asked if Amazon will be more active on the remainder market, told *PW Daily* that the company "will do what its customers ask for."

New Children's Imprint

The Millbrook Press will launch a children's trade imprint with approximately fifteen titles in Spring, 2002, under the name Roaring Brook Press.

The imprint's list is described as "author-and-literature-driven, high-quality and distinctive." Roaring Brook Press plans to publish about forty titles—picture books, novels, and other formats—per year. Deborah Brodie, formerly of Viking, is executive editor.

List Your New Release

Painted Rock has just opened a "new release" area where you can have information about your new release listed.

Go to: <http://www.paintedrock.com>

Then click "New Release" on the left side of the screen. It'll take you to the area where you can click information on how to get your book listed.

Teen Historicals

Starting in the spring of 2002, HarperCollins, parent company of Avon Books, will ▶ ▶ ▶

RESEARCH ROADBLOCKS

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ the Persian Shah-Nameh (Book of Kings) and a legendary Turanian (the Persians called the land east of Persia—Sogdiana—"Turan") general also named—you guessed it—Afrasiab. Ha! I pounce on this. At last, I have found something my Welshman does not know!

"I stand corrected, sweetheart," he says graciously upon receipt of this historical tidbit, valiantly stifling a laugh at my manifest glee in finally one-upping him. In reality, he is delighted that I have uncovered this, because, clearly, his own brain is a sponge, constantly soaking up knowledge. So I know he is even now competently filing away this piece of information somewhere in his mind, just as he does everything else. "In that case, you should be perfectly safe in assuming the hill was called 'Afrasiab' in 106 B.C.," he continues.

Back To The Box

At this point, I figure I do not have one single reader on the entire planet who will know all this material in such depth and detail as I now know it, and that after all this hard work, if I receive even one single "correcting" letter from a fan, I am simply going to flip out and wind up being carted away by the men in white coats.

"My puzzle box has next to travel from Sogdiana to Britain," I inform my Welshman, "and right now, my brain is so fried from all this historical research that I don't have a clue about how to make that happen...but somehow via the Parthians and Romans, I had thought," I venture hesitantly, waiting rather uneasily for him to punch holes in this notion, too.

"Hmmm. Well, yes, the Parthians could have taken it from Sogdiana, and Mark Antony led a contingent that defeated the Parthians in battle, whereupon he could have seized your puzzle box, and he was good friends with Herod the Great in Judaea so could have then sent it off to him for safekeeping, whence it could have

gone on to Rome," my Welshman replies, much to my vast relief.

"And Constantius the First could then have carried it to Britain in 306 A.D.!" I crow. Thank goodness, I am now up to the Dark Ages British Isles! I have researched the Dark Ages British Isles and their Celts and Picts for decades, so I already know how badly mixed up all the history of the Dark Ages British Isles actually is. This, I have uncovered at great length for myself. I had just never before until now realized how confused and misdocumented the history of the rest of the world frequently is, as well.

We go on through Austrasia in 679 A.D., Septimania in 795 A.D., Al-Andalus in 1236 A.D., France in 1379 A.D., and, finally, Scotland in 1446 A.D. It is the same story all the way along, errors in various sources all down the line.

History Wasn't

History as we believe it was often simply wasn't, I recognize. Even our very best and most highly respected sources for such information can be incomplete (presenting us with only one theory—the author's own), misleading (misinterpretation or distortion of facts to support hypotheses is, in reality, quite common; and at least one very well-known author with highly speculative ideas has now been exposed as having paid to have fake clay pots and so forth manufactured to advance his own notions), or just plain wrong. Thus, in addition to being writers and storytellers, when it comes to research, we all have to be investigators and logical deductors, closely scrutinizing not only our sources, but also the credentials and objectives of those who have authored same.

So, a word to the wise: When examining sources, take especial heed of multifaceted viewpoints and hypotheses, direct quotes and paraphrases, footnotes, and bibliographies—or the conspicuous lack thereof. Is there only one viewpoint being presented—the author's own—and repeatedly hammered home? Be well advised, then, that your entire source is biased and thus being deliberately slanted.

Ethical scholars and other experts do not hesitate to provide opposing viewpoints and theories, and to explain in detail why they don't agree with them. Look up quoted and paraphrased passages in their original texts to be certain they have been properly and comprehensively cited—not mistranslated, conveniently shortened, taken out of context, or otherwise “fudged” to support an author's hypotheses.

Carefully check out footnotes and bibliographies. Is the material contained in a source being drawn from equally credible sources? Be extremely wary of sources that don't tell you where their authors got their information—or how their authors deduced it themselves because of their own expertise to do that. “According to Professor John Doe” is not acceptable if an author doesn't tell you what John Doe is professor of—or where. For all you know, unless an author informs you otherwise, “Professor” John Doe might have received his degree from a nonaccredited institution and be teaching classes to kooks in his basement!

Is an author him/herself accredited? Actually read his/her bio; don't ignore it. XYZ Doctorate-Degreed Folklorist is—usually—going to prove a much more believable authority on folklore than Dear Old Aunt Minnie, who's decided to pen a few words about the tradition of Easter eggs, just because she's always enjoyed dyeing and decorating them. Be aware that Academia, particularly, teems with scholars who regularly (and frequently scathingly) attack one another in print. Pay attention to these assaults.

If the authors of several sources all think the author of a single source in the same field is a crackpot, make it your business to find out why. If it's because ABC New-Age Author is telling everyone that the asteroid belt was once a huge planet before being destroyed, and beaucoup Ph.D. astronomers are reporting that the asteroid belt doesn't contain nearly enough debris mass to account for its having once been a huge planet, then do yourself a favor: Think real hard before concurring with ABC New-Age

Author. (See *The Skeptic's Dictionary* at: <http://dcn.davis.ca.us/~btcarrol/skeptic/refuge/skeplink.html> for viewpoints debunking popular myths and legends, and the exposure of well-known authors known irrefutably—or, for entirely legitimate reasons, widely believed—to have presented totally outlandish theories to, or to have perpetrated outright frauds on, the public.)

In closing, in more ways than one, writing *Destiny's Daughter* has proved a wonderful, valuable learning experience for me. I now know the histories of many ancient peoples and lands I had previously never, or had only cursorily, examined, or had never even been aware existed. I also now know never again to take any source, no matter how well known, well respected, well written, or seemingly well researched I may initially believe it to be, at face value—especially an Internet source. Unfortunately, the Internet, while it certainly can prove a time-saving, productive, worthwhile tool, is also completely rife with countless websites chock-full of misinformation and disinformation, most of it simply careless and unintentional, but some of it deliberately bent on deception, for whatever unknown purposes at work in its Webmasters' minds.

And from now on, whenever I spot errors in other authors' novels, I'll be much more charitable, too, always wondering whether it is not their fault, but, rather, the sources they used that have failed them and are ultimately to blame. Because, as writers, we are all only as good as our research—and our research is only as **good as our sources**. I know that, henceforth, I'll definitely be taking all my own sources with the proverbial grain of salt.

Rebecca Brandewyne is the award-winning author of nearly thirty historical and contemporary novels and novellas. Her latest release, Destiny's Daughter, will be published in December 2001 by MIRA Books—and needless to say, she has dedicated it to her Welshman!



BREAKING NEWS

publish historical romances aimed at teens. Abigail McAdan, associate editor at HarperCollins, spearheads the program.

She says the books will target ages twelve and up. The program will launch with three books, continuing with one book a month thereafter. Books will be 60,000-65,000 words, they're looking for published authors, and they'd like to see a 10- to 20-page synopsis plus three chapters (or your latest book). Query McAdan at HarperCollins, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019.

Bills, Bills, Bills

Two bills in Congress would give tax breaks to writers who donate research materials to libraries and other nonprofit institutions. Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy has sponsored Senate bill S. 2781, The Artist-Museum Partnership Act. In the House, New York Rep. Amos Houghton sponsored bill H.R. 3249, The Artists' Contribution to American Heritage Act of 1999.

The intent of both bills is to allow taxpayers to take a deduction once again for research materials donated to nonprofit institutions. Currently, there are no tax incentives.

You can go to www.house.gov or www.senate.gov to e-mail your views on these bills to your representative or senator. For information on the status of either bill, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov> and type in the bill number.

Continued on p. 16 ▶ ▶ ▶

Online.....by Lorraine Heath

The Internet makes accessing information relatively effortless. It also makes it incredibly easy to unintentionally infringe on someone's copyright. As usual with publishing, the more I learn, the more I fear that I know only enough to be a danger to myself. I recently purchased *Getting Permission: How to License & Clear Copyrighted Materials Online & Off* by attorney Richard Stim. I highly recommend this book to anyone who designs his or her own website, manages a website, has a promotional website, is considering getting involved with a website, or simply scours the Internet for useful information.

Something as common as putting a hyperlink on your site has the potential to create trouble if it's not handled properly. Many web owners disapprove of the practice of using a "deep" link which bypasses the website's home page and goes directly to an area within the site.

"Framing," which brings information into a site from another site, can also be a cause of disputes. In this situation, a hyperlink does not take you to another site. Rather, you stay on the original site and the information is "brought" to you. Stim advises, "Even if your link appears perfectly legal, it is considered good online etiquette ('netiquette') to obtain consent for all links."

In his book, he provides examples of permission requests for various situations that involve licensing or copyright clearance. He then goes one step further to provide a diskette that contains these forms for easier use. This comprehensive book is written in an easy-to-understand format and discusses copyright issues involving text, music, art, photos, cartoons, and web content.

Promotion

Fran Baker shared "an English site that actually specializes in adventure, sci-fi, fantasy, etc. The reviewer/webmaster's name is Lesley Meade, and the site is **www.Booknet.org.uk**. Lesley links to Amazon.uk, which might be a drawback, but ... what the hey, it's another way to expose our work to the world. If you contact Lesley, feel free to say I sent you. Nothing in it for me but goodwill on a future book (I hope!). You do have to send the book to get it reviewed, which may be a consideration in whether you choose to do this.

Romance Fiction Site guide, Becci Davis, **Romancefiction.guide@about.com**, explains that "Romance Fiction at About.com is a one-stop site for all fans of romance fiction: readers, writers, authors, and those just interested in romance news. There are chats every Thursday night with published romance authors. Transcripts of the chats are also posted on the site afterward. We review all genres of romance fiction including novels and anthologies. We list

author promos/contests, writing contests, authors' websites, new romance sales...anything of interest to the romance fiction community!

"I am also accepting article submissions, romance short stories, and actively seeking reviewers for novels! (Please note: submissions/reviews are not paid at this time, but full credit with byline is given.) Starting in 2001, Romance Fiction will hold an annual 'Best Romance Books' feature/promotion as voted by our reviewers.

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"For authors interested in submitting their books for review by our About.com reviewers, they can send them to me at: Becci Davis; Romance Fiction Guide; PO Box 150099; Denver CO 80215-0099.

"I am also very happy to talk to authors about doing a live chat or author interview. Some of the authors we have scheduled are: Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Jo Beverly, Katherine Sutcliffe, Susan Andersen, and Stella Cameron."

About.com offers much more than romance. I have queried a few of the other guides asking for submission guidelines and information on the many different ways that authors can promote themselves at the site. I'll share the information when I receive it, but if you're anxious for the information, you can visit About.com and click the "Art/Humanities" icon. You will then receive a listing of the various book-related sites they offer, including Fantasy/Sci-Fi, Horror, Mystery, Poetry, Women Writers, and Young Adult. Under Writing/Publishing, you'll find information on screenwriting, freelance writing, and publishing. I have not yet checked out all the sites.

E-Pubbing

Members on Ninclink began discussing whether a need existed for an organization that addressed the concerns of authors who were electronically published. Roberta Gellis alerted us to the fact that "there already is an e-organization. Many of the members are only e-published, but there are also members who are published in both paper and on disk. I am a member and I am predominantly published in paper, but I have two short stories and one novel e-published. I think you can reach the website at www.egroups.com/group/EPIC1.

"Probably the interests of this group, which are primarily to win respect for e-publications, are not the same as those of Ninc members ... but who knows what a meld would produce."

Price Comparisons

Joyce Marlow uses "a shopping comparison software program (free download) called EvenBetter that initializes itself when I go to any online store selling books, music, movies, and other selected shopping, and will then search all its databases and show me a dozen places the same product is sold, with prices and shipping costs. When the software is in use, it pops up an inch-wide toolbar at the bottom of my screen. Here's where to go if interested: www.evenbetter.com/evenbetterexpressshops.html." She also "found a new book search site that searches 41 book e-tailers!" at www.addall.com.

Valerie Taylor recommends www.pricegrabber.com

"whenever you're looking for something. They'll check all the online stores and even calculate tax and shipping to find the cheapest deal for you. **Ubid.com** is also excellent for finding good deals."

Feel-good Sites

When browsing the Internet, don't forget to drop by the many sites that now allow you to make donations with only a click of an icon. Companies sponsor the site and make contributions based on the number of clicks a site receives. The idea behind the program is that you're seeing their advertising. For world hunger, visit www.thehungersite.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/CTDSites. To donate a mammogram, visit www.thebreastcancersite.com. At either site, you will find links to the Rainforest Site, Kids' Aids Site, Child Survival Site, and the Landmine Site. By visiting various stores from each site, you can add to your "contribution." You also have the opportunity to purchase products at the site which will provide further donations.

Novelists, Inc. Listserve

At www.egroups.com/group/NINCLINK, you can learn more about NincLink, subscribe, or set your preferences (digest, individual posts, etc.). See the charts for options and contacts.

If you discover sites that you think would be of interest to Novelists, Inc. members, please e-mail me at LorraineHe@aol.com.

Fast Track.....Compiled by Marilyn Pappano

The Fast Track is a monthly report on Novelists, Inc. members on the USA Today top 150 bestseller list. 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."

USA Today Bestseller list for Dec. 2000*

Jill Barnett, GERALYN Dawson, et al, *A Season in the Highlands*, Pocket

Sandra Brown, *In a Class by Itself*, Bantam
Kay Hooper, *Out of the Shadows*, Bantam
Andrea Kane, *Run for your Life*, Pocket
Jayne Ann Krentz, *Man with a Past*, Mira
Julia Quinn, *The Viscount Who Loved Me*, Avon
Nora Roberts, Jill Gregory, Ruth Ryan Langan, and
Marianne Willman, *Once Upon a Dream*, Jove
Nora Roberts, *Heart of the Sea*, Jove
Nora Roberts, *The Stanislawski Brothers*, Silhouette

* The publisher's data for the December 2000 *USA Today* bestseller list was fraught with errors and inconsistencies throughout the entire month. Any errors or omissions are inadvertent due to insufficient data, and members may notify Marilyn for clarification in the next issue of *NINK*.



VANCOUVER 2000

CONFERENCE REPORTS

The following workshops were reported by Gordon Aalborg, who freely admits to having spent the first two days of the conference getting ready to be married and the last two recovering from it. His judgment may thus be declared suspect, but he claims kudos just for being able to read his notes a week later. Also, his mental spell-checker remains defiantly Australian, for some reason.

Best Laid Plans: The Utility, Futility, Promise, and Pitfalls of Career Planning; when should you stay the course, take the road less travelled, or throw away the map?

Perhaps the best thing to emerge from this forum was the **SMART** acronym, related, as I recall, by Carla Neggers. Whatever we may visualise in the field of career planning, it should be—and everyone agreed—**Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-possible.**

It also helps to know your market intimately, but only if you can convince your editor, agent, and all else concerned that you do. And all agreed that luck plays a strong part in finding the balance between muse and market, and you need every break you can get.

Too Hot to Handle: Writing Erotica; is it hot in every way, including sales? How far is too far? How will the rest of popular fiction be affected?

Linda Howard

Not too hot, and far too late, this **Night Owl Session.** About all that came out of a far-from-animated discussion led by Linda Howard [tired but not looking it] was the fact that erotica is a widely varied field and constant checking of the markets and requirements is vital.

On this occasion, however, everybody was too jet-lagged or plain tired out to care much, except in agreeing there is a difference between erotic and pornographic. Or maybe the presence of a man in the room put them off their stride. Whatever... the topic was almost longer than the discussion.

Building and Sustaining a Career in Series Publishing

Editors Leslie Wainger and Marsha Zinberg [standing in for Isabel Swift] and agents Damaris Rowland and Charles Schlessiger

Quotes [in no particular order of significance] pretty much sum up this topic.

"You have to have a voice." Leslie Wainger. And, "That category track record is so very important."

"There is so much room for growth." Marsha Zinberg.

"The first thing you have to do is become more prolific." Leslie again.

"Voice is really what you're selling." Damaris Rowland.

"Writing is just storytelling." Leslie Wainger.

"An author needs an ally in this day and age. It is important for writers to write." Charles Schlessiger.

All of which translates to the fact that opportunities exist and you'll have to work for what you get out of them, but it can be done, and there is no need, all seemed to agree, to give up category writing to move into series work if you're so inclined and can find an agent and/or editor to agree.

Getting Media Attention

Jennifer McCord and Sandy Huseby

The two reviewers—Jennifer for Waldenbooks, Sandy for BookPage

—stressed that media networking follows the same patterns as publisher networking. Whenever possible, build contacts with the reviewers themselves. Sandy noted that generic promotion to media may mean your Advanced Review Copies, etc., don't get to reviewers in time, if at all.

Like other facets of the business, know the basics—deadlines, column or newsletter content, etc. And even if you're a NYT-bestselling author, don't assume a harried publicist has made the contacts—check for yourself. Jennifer brought handouts and both talked about tchochkes, mailers, etc.—emphasizing logical tie-ins with your book and not the same-old, same-old.

The Blended Novel: Literary Meets Popular

Sarah Gallick and Dawn Reno

Ah... semantics. Define "Literary." Define "Popular." And already you're far ahead of this discussion, which eventually did neither except to suggest that "literary" work has more emphasis on character than on plot and has a less urgent quality.

And the issue, really, isn't definition anyway—it is all about positioning, which is in the hands of editors, publishers, and booksellers.

And Oprah Winfrey, who got more than a passing mention, it having been determined that Oprah Book Club members go on to the next Oprah book instead of seeking out the next or previous work by authors to whom they have been introduced via Oprah.

The whole discussion was so convoluted and yet simple that I lost track of who said what, and therefore cannot accurately attribute:

"Nobody starts out wanting to be small and precious." [Sarah, I think.]

"The author does need to be aware of opportunities and know how to pitch them."

"I want to see who is the agent who is dealing with what editor."

That final quote might be the guts of the issue. Both commentators and audience seemed sure of the editor's importance in the complicated topic of "blended" novels.

Publishers Present

Claire Zion, Nancy Martin, Isabel Swift

This forum quickly evolved into a detailed discussion, which revolved strongly around the future of e-publishing and some of the changes it will make in the marketplace.

Claire Zion's iPublish.com is the newest approach by Time Warner into the e-pub marketplace, and offers some unusual approaches. She described it as an interactive publishing house, and quickly ran through the three elements featured.

iWrite: In which writers will read other writers' works and review them.

iRead: a showcase for published works...and...

iLearn: a place to exchange knowledge and ideas.

Claire described iPublish.com as a place for authors to interact with readers, a place to take risks, try out new directions. And, she frankly admitted, "We're all going to learn as we go along."

Nancy Martin's NovelsNow.com is being marketed as a consignment shop for published authors, described by Nancy as, "A convenient parking lot for your books."

She sees the opportunity as one in which authors can find new outlets for their backlist, assuming they have resumed the rights, and a good way to keep one's books out there in the marketplace as well.

Certainly a concept worthy of exploration.

Isabel Swift of Harlequin focused primarily on the speedy changes in the technology and the problems faced by publishers in keeping up with that change.

"The market forces do drive change," she said. "Just because I say yes today doesn't mean I have to say yes tomorrow." She said the plethora of formats already involved in e-publishing mean large and increasing problems for publishers seeking to get works into the most appropriate and commercial digitalised formats.

As for distribution, it was generally agreed that for now, Amazon has set the standard and others will be forced to follow in that vein.

The Art of Negotiating: How to Ask for What You Want

Alan Kaufman

Entertainment attorney Alan Kaufman, who represented Penguin for twenty years, had thought he was going to be part of a panel, but he adapted to his solo presentation role without so much as a tremor.

"Negotiation should be a win-win situation," he said almost at the outset, and then he proceeded to explain some of the specific areas where authors should be careful, given that, "from knowledge comes flexibility."

Alan suggested that a good contract between any two parties "should essentially meet the needs of both parties." He was adamant that merchandising and performance rights should not go to a publisher, being outside a publisher's area of expertise, and that "grant of rights" and "reservation of rights" clauses are vital to authors.

He suggests "editorial acceptability" as a better choice of term and intent than "changed market conditions" when dickering about a publisher's possible choice not to publish a book already under



contract.

"A publisher has a responsibility to publish the book," he said and added that any return-of-advance clause should be carefully examined before signing, as opposed to when it might be called into play. He sees no reason for a publisher not to include an author in an insurance policy covering errors and omissions, since it should cost the publisher nothing and offer the author vast security against any sort of nuisance lawsuit, for example.

The new "print on demand" technology, he said, should not become a licence for publishers to keep a book in print and therefore within the publisher's control unless some income factor can be established to limit this situation. Once a book can no longer earn that minimum amount per year, he says there is no reason not to allow resumption of rights by the author.

He sees the e-publishing phenomenon as the harbinger of vast and real changes, and advises authors to keep up with the issues because publishers will, and it is certainly an area where knowledge is power.

His best advice: If a publisher's best excuse for keeping a clause is "because it's policy" or "because we've always done it that way," you should be safe in demanding its removal as irrelevant or at least open to serious question. Ditto, in spades, if they say it really isn't important anyway.

The Anthology and Books of Linked Continuity

Damaris Rowland, Kate Seaver, Marsha Zinberg

"What are the challenges to authors, agents, and editors in writing, selling, and publishing the multiple-author project? What are the creative and ▶▶▶



VANCOUVER 2000

CONFERENCE REPORTS

► ► ► financial rewards?”

Well, that was the question. The answers, as provided in this last-topic-of-the-last-day discussion, were predictable, uninspiring, and perhaps more suited to a state conference for wannabes.

How to get involved in such a project? Wait to be asked. Benefits? Exposure, fun, collaboration, sharing, and presumably money. And you can learn about flexibility and compromise. A learning experience...if you're asked in the first place. And a very, very long hour's listening.

The following report was filed by Jeanne Savery Cassstevens because the bridegroom was getting ready for the wedding.

Online Presence: What a Website Can and Can't Do For You

Brenda Hiatt Barber

To the best of anyone's knowledge, no one knows what a website can really do for a writer and the writer's name recognition and/or sales. Nevertheless, authors who have had webpages in place for some time acknowledge a more-than-reasonable number of hits.

The discussion moved to creating do-it-yourself pages vs. getting professional help. The consensus was that it is best to find affordable help, at least for the set-up. What is included depends on complexity of site, but the aim is to inform one's readers of upcoming releases. Beyond that, the sky's the limit: Covers, bibliography, teasers, games, contests, constantly updated letters to the general reader....

Those who have had sites for some time say that certain things turn people off: Music, animation, and, in particular, scrolling horizontally. It

was suggested that once the site is up that you check with people using different browsers: some can mess up what looks perfect at your end. Fiddling with the site can solve most of this problem.

Links are essential. Amazon, other online bookstores, your publisher, RWA, Ninc, etc. were all suggested. (Author's note: Recent discussion of Amazon on the Ninclink suggests one NOT link to it until the current situation re the used-book sale of new or nearly new books is resolved.)

A discussion of how personal a site should be was inconclusive. Jo Beverly says it should reflect one's work, but Laura Resnick's site was cited as an excellent example of the personal. Why have a site? Suggestions include keeping in touch in our mobile society, maintaining relationships, developing friendships, and coordinating help.

The following reports were written by Olivia Rupperecht, who also writes as Mallory Rush.

Open Forum

Night Owl Session #3

This free-for-all session began with the consumption of various yummy confections that elicited such sybaritic sighs it's a wonder the moral police weren't sent in to investigate just what was going on behind closed doors.

Quite a lot, as it turned out, before this diverse group licked the last bit of sweetness from their fingertips and turned in for the night—or headed for the bar, depending upon moral proclivities. Of course, one of the great things about getting a group of writers together is their ability to put aside

any number of personal disparities when it comes to this amazing, maddening career path we've all chosen.

Looking over the chaotic spread of notes taken, it all seems to boil down to this question: How do we write well amidst internal and/or external mayhem; how do we maintain some semblance of sanity in the oft-insane orbit we inhabit? Fortunately there's comfort to be found in like company. And there's wisdom to be had from sharing “been there, done that” tales from storytellers like us.

So you weren't there. Next best thing, grab a bowl of popcorn and dig into this:

Play. Yes, you have permission because it's good for you and your work. There is much merit to be found in messing around, whether “squandering” your time on watching movies, taking a long walk to air out the brain, or chilling with whatever guilty pleasure one might secretly exult in. Should that guilty pleasure be an addiction to the Internet or compulsive e-mail checking, however, BEWARE! What we attribute to justifiable hours put into the job can become an excuse to avoid the inevitable confrontation of the blank page.

Workaholism. Is there a Writers Anonymous anywhere? Seems that more than a few of us have succumbed at some point to the driving quest to be the absolute best as we write, Write, WRITE, to the exclusion of our families, our mental and physical health, our ability to simply appreciate being alive. It can take a startling reality check—such as getting diagnosed with cancer or having a death in the family—to shake obsessive-compulsive writers loose from the keyboard and make

them reevaluate priorities. What is really important in life? What do we truly hold most dear? Is it a life richly experienced, or a shelf full of books penned while the perimeters outside it remain empty?

Burnout. Finding a healthy balance so writing doesn't take over one's life isn't necessarily easy, particularly for fervent newbies just breaking in. The blush is still on the rose, the rose-tinted glasses are still perched on the nose, and passion flows through the veins like a heady intoxicant. Yet such blissful naivete is long gone for workhorses who feel more like the nag that Scarlett dropped dead in the road than a prancing Lippizaner on stage. When the act of writing becomes more of a job than a joy, what's a writer to do? Go dig ditches instead? Actually, moving some earth with a shovel (better yet, your bare hands) isn't a bad idea. Activities such as gardening have a way of feeding the creative soul and nurturing the mental processes of writing.

"Does this feed my creative soul or detract from it?" is a question we need to frequently ask ourselves when burnout threatens or fear of failure sets in. Forcing ourselves to write against natural tendencies is yet another energy-sapping bugaboo. So go ahead and grab a hoe, then hack those creative parasites to pieces. Your inner child will thank you. And so will your yard.

Someone observed that we often fail to give ourselves credit for the courage it takes to be a writer, self-exposure and all that. Yet like the Dance of the Seven Veils, we can still manage to keep something covering us, if we move quickly. This takes practice and skill, particularly when a book takes over and whoa, mama, hang onto your hat. It's something most non-writers wouldn't get, but the poet Charles Ghigna captured something of our condition quite well:

*Writers write what they know best,
their passions, fears, and dreams.*

*Writers never write about
what others call their "themes."*

Moving On Up

(Many thanks to Chris Pacheco for taking notes in the first two night owl sessions.)

Wheeey doggie! With Susan Wiggs leading the dance, this session was livelier than a hoe-down at the Clampetts. One of the most important steps in her upwardly mobile strategies has been the belief that success can be "pulled from the jaws of failure." Neatly swinging into the subject of animal husbandry, Susan offered an analogy of writers as cows. That's right, cows. And just what kind of cow are you? A new one or an old one? If a writer's been with a publisher for a long time, he could be perceived as an "old cow." Sometimes a "new cow" is more attractive to a publisher.

That in mind, it was suggested that obtaining a second publisher (you're the new cow there!) may make a writer seem more valuable to the first. Other suggestions included:

Make your work more consistent and accessible. That way publishers know what they're getting when you turn in a book.

Write a complete book to get to the next level.

Look at a publisher's author strategy: do they "grow" their authors into success, buy new authors, or do they steal successful authors from other houses? Does the house have breakout potential?

Figure out who has the in-house power. Can you work with this person?

Develop a strategy with your agent.

Be proactive in your own career. Ask what list position and what print ads are being done, etc.

Publishers are overworked so double check to be sure they keep their commitments.

Hire a publicist and/or be publicity savvy, even if it means shelling out some of your own



bucks.

"Try to think like a publisher," was perhaps one of the best suggestions of all. Such thinking is bound to make one ponder: Am I a new cow or an old Nellie? A question worth considering if a writer's bovine status truly makes a difference when it comes to moo-ving on up.

The Wedding of Gordon Aalborg and Deni Dietz

He appeared first, wearing a nervous smile and a neatly pressed dark suit. The small chapel was filled to overflowing with well-wishers, lovely flowers, much chatter and laughter. Terey daly Ramin could have stopped traffic in her chic formal gown, but it was the bride who made the real fashion statement as attendees hummed "The Wedding March" while she floated down the aisle. From her Tazmanian Tiger sweater to her sandal clad feet, Deni was as unfettered by convention in her nuptials as she is in her writing.

Just as unique were the vows Deni and Gordon had penned, each proving themselves romantic wordsmiths with a great sense of humor. Much to the delight of all, Deni revealed that she also knows how to sing. Really sing! Barbara Streisand is a hard act to follow, but the bride delivered a flawless solo to the "One Love" she pledged to honor (though I don't recall hearing anything about obey). After the rites were finished and sealed with an impressive wedding kiss, Gordon offered his blessing on their union thusly:

"What Ninc has brought together and joined together, may no man, no woman, nor editor, nor agent, nor copyeditor—if they still exist—attempt to put asunder."



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 9

Not So Mighty After All

Less than a month after online publishing company MightyWords.com cut a majority of self-published titles it sold in favor of selling more marketable work from name-brand authors, it decided to stop selling directly to customers and sell content only through affiliated websites.

"We're removing ourselves from the marketplace of e-books and moving into the marketplace of information," said vice-president and general manager Judy Kirkpatrick.

CEO Chris MacAskill abashedly told the *Wall Street Journal*, "We started out with a vision of self-publishing that was a little misguided on my part. It is highly branded, highly credible, high-quality stuff that sells. Writing is hard. We are technologists who approached this and were perhaps a little naive about that."

Chasing Names Follow-Up

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which governs domain ownership on the Web, recently ruled in favor of R.L. Stine, Louis Sachar, and seven other authors who, through The Authors Guild, had filed a complaint against Old Barn Studios, Ltd., a British-based company that had claimed ".com" ownership of their names.

An arbitration panel for ICAAN found that Old Barn had acted in bad faith in taking the names.

▶ ▶ ▶



Luncheon Speech: The Coming Age of E-books

To e-pub or not to e-pub, that was the question on just about everyone's mind at the Vancouver conference. During a lively discussion of e-pubbing held the morning of our second day, Claire Zion, of Warner's iPublish, stated that since the under-thirty population is not reading print books, e-books will provide a much-needed alternative. Neal Coonerty, president of the American Bookseller's Association, who addressed that controversial subject at lunch that same day, thinks that electronic publication has yet to prove its case.

After his bookstore was destroyed in California's 1989 earthquake, Coonerty set up shop in Santa Cruz in a tent serviced by a port-a-potty. Further proof of his bona fides as a committed independent bookseller resides in the fact that during this long and difficult period he pursued on behalf of the ABA a \$20 million lawsuit arising from the unfair discounts given major bookstore chains by publishers, which, according to Coonerty, drove half of his association's membership out of business. In his opinion, e-pubbing is the latest wolf to come knocking at the booksellers' and authors' doors, albeit in a more alluring disguise, and the ABA would like to work with writers to help protect their mutual interests.

Coonerty said that although the academic market appears to be a natural for electronic publishing, he questioned its suitability for trade books and their authors, citing the

present lack of a uniform platform, the worrisome possibility of piracy, and the issue of secondary rights. He also wondered how willing older readers will be to trade the "friendliness" of paper books for onscreen text and pricey mechanical reading devices. He predicted that the unhurried browsing and informed choices provided by brick-and-mortar bookstores will continue to offer a welcome change from the fast-paced computer-dominated workplace.

Citing the major publishers—Warner, Harlequin, Random House—who have either entered or are warming up for the e-pub race, Coonerty posed some unsettling questions for writers contemplating hitching their word processors to these emerging virtual stars:

(1) Will self-publishing be not only legitimized, but institutionalized, thus flooding the electronic market with unedited work of, at best, dubious quality?

(2) Taking into account all the pricing factors involved, some of which are as yet unknown, will e-book publication really translate into the bigger profits hyped by its promoters?

"Authors and their agents should start thinking through these issues now," Coonerty advised, "for, like it or not, the e-book market is coming of age, faster than some of us would prefer."

— Reported by Joyce C. Ware

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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

Roxanne Rustand, Cedar Rapids, IA
Ellen Godfrey, Victoria, BC, Canada

New Members

Carole Bellacera, Manassas, VA
Lori Royal-Gordon (*Lauren Royal*), Irvine, CA
JoAnn Ferguson (*J.A. Ferguson, Jeanna Hampton, JoAnn Brown, Rebecca North*), Rehoboth, MA
Lynda Sue Cooper (*Lynda Sandoval*), Littleton, CO
Gayle Callen, Liverpool, NY
Dee Davis Oberwetter (*Dee Davis*), Austin, TX

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



BREAKING NEWS



From Bad to Hearse

In conjunction with Book Sense, Hyperion is running a bookseller contest to title author Tim Cockey's third novel, scheduled for publication in 2002. The winning title will grace the sequel to Cockey's *The Hearse You Came In On* and his forthcoming *Hearse of a Different Color*.

Jane Comins, Hyperion's marketing director, says, "My favorite so far is *A Hearse Is a Hearse, of Corpse, of Corpse*." We tried to reach Cockey for a comment, but he had a cold and was too hearse to talk.

The store with the winning entry will get an in-store event with Cockey.

Pamela Browning has written a whole bunch of stuff in the corpse of her career—some good, some bad, none of it hearse.



Laura Resnick

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Amazonia”

Stop me if you’ve heard this one before:

A guy walks into a large retail bookstore, picks out a new release, and takes it to the check-out line. The store manager, however, takes him aside and says, “Hey, don’t buy that book here! I know a guy selling this title secondhand out in the alley, and he gives me a cut of every sale I send his way. So buy from him instead!”

This is exactly what’s been going on at Amazon since November 2000. That was when Amazon installed the infamous “blue boxes” on every individual book page; these are links which urge customers to “click here!” in order to buy the exact same title secondhand, or (wait for it!) to offer their own used copy for sale.

Now, let’s get one thing straight from the start: I am emphatically *not* opposed to used bookstores. I not only buy secondhand books, I also don’t get upset when I see my own books available secondhand.

A certain percentage of any book’s retail readers aren’t going to like it or want to keep their copy of it. (Also, sometimes they’re just moving to Nepal, or making new shelf space in a studio apartment, or getting rid of books some well-meaning relative erroneously believed they’d like, or inheriting a collection they don’t want. And so on and so forth.) Now there are any number of things such a person might do with an unwanted book. They could sell it in a garage sale or on eBay. They could give it away to a friend. They could sell it or trade it in at a used bookstore. They could donate it to the library (which, incidentally, holds its own used-book sales when *it* doesn’t want books anymore). Any of these options are fine with me.

In each of these events, the book has already earned my royalty through its sale in the retail market; it’s never going to be stripped or returned. No matter how long the publisher holds back my royalties as reserves against returns, sooner or later it does have to credit me for that sale. And that royalty earned, legally and contractually, is my sole financial right with regard to the sale of that individual copy of that book.

So do I want the unhappy retail purchaser to throw that unwanted book into a garbage can? No. Indeed, the thought appalls me. Do I want a law passed to force him to keep the book even though he doesn’t want it? No. Since the physical copy of the book is legally his personal property, not my intellectual property, such legislation would change the legal conditions surrounding a great many other kinds of personal property besides books.

Legal Explanation

Just in case there’s any confusion about the legality of selling used books, lawyer and Ninc member Ronn Kaiser has given me permission to quote from his lucid explanation about this on Ninlink: “Copyright prevents anyone from REPRODUCING and distributing a work without permission because that work is the intellectual property of the creator. A writer licenses a publisher to reproduce his/her intellectual property for manufacture, distribution, and sale in exchange for royalties... The physical book produced under license [is] a product. A product can be sold and resold. Under the contract with the publisher the author only gets a royalty on the original sale because that’s all the publisher gets paid for itself.”

(Let’s review: The physical book produced under license is a product, and a product can be sold and resold.)

Having explained the extant law, Ronn also adds that he strongly believes it ought to be changed so that “RESALE by a commercial enterprise simply be made illegal within two years of the original pub date, UNLESS a royalty is paid.”

Ronn Kaiser has, of course, touched on the key issue which many authors object to in the used-book trade: Under current law, we don’t earn royalties from it. Whether or not you believe we *should* be entitled to royalties from used-book sales, we *aren’t* so entitled under current law. Yet even under current law, I strongly favor seeing unwanted-by-retail-purchaser copies of my books in the used marketplace as opposed to seeing them in the trash can (or collecting dust in some cellar) because of what we, as authors, *do* get out of the used marketplace: new readers.

I’m realistic enough to know that not every single reader who buys my book retail will always keep it. However, I’m also confident enough (some would say arrogant, and others have called me worse than that) to believe that if someone acquires my book used—whether in a used bookstore, or on eBay, or as an already-read gift, or at a garage sale—there’s a good chance they’ll like it so much they’ll want to read more of my books... and will even be moved to go buy my new release at retail prices rather than prowl the used market in the hope that they can eventually find it there. A copy of my book in the secondhand market is, in essence, a consumer sample which has already earned my royalty in its retail sale and which is now circulating in an attempt to attract another reader (perhaps one who doesn’t want to experiment with

unfamiliar writers at retail prices) to my work on a long-term basis.

Now, of course, there's a potential inversion formula here. If *so many* copies of my books were getting into the used market, and even re-circulating so often there, that they were genuinely having an adverse effect on my income, that would clearly be a big problem. However, I would have to regard my own writing, rather than the used-book trade, as the first issue which I must examine in that crisis: Why do so many readers find my books expendable, and what must I do to make my books the kind that most readers keep?

(And, no, I don't only think this way because I write in a genre, sf/f, where the secondhand trade of recent releases has always been minimal. I viewed the used-book trade exactly the same way during the years I spent as a Silhouette writer.)

The Times, They Are A'Changin'

However, all the *tsuris* of the used-book trade debate notwithstanding, I do agree that changing times and changing technology could turn a system which, in my opinion, has worked fine for decades into a system which, as Ronn Kaiser believes, needs to be changed by law. (I don't say that I *do* agree with Ronn, just that I'm undecided.)

Anyhow, while I am emphatically not opposed to the used-book trade in general, I am vehemently and hotly opposed to a retail bookseller urging readers *not* to buy my books retail! I am *so opposed* to it that I have written any number of nasty letters to Amazon about it, have complained to many other writers about it, have removed all Amazon links from my website, have told Amazon to take its Associates program and *BLEEP*, have urged everyone I know to stop shopping at Amazon, have stopped shopping at Amazon myself... [*CURMUDGEON GASPS FOR BREATH*]

Where was I?

Oh, yes.

I am also far from the only Nincer to do these things. Indeed, a large portion of the whole publishing community is up in arms about the practice of (my mind boggles every time I think of it) a major retail bookseller actively urging customers to buy books (including brand-new releases) secondhand rather than retail. Hundreds of writers have protested individually. The Authors Guild and the American Association of Publishers have written to Amazon in protest; the media attention surrounding this salvo was particularly satisfying, given that Amazon previously claimed that much of the publishing community (wait for it!) approved and supported the blue-box policy. We all knew this was self-serving rubbish, of course, but it was good to see the truth getting out after this early attempt by Amazon to confound the issue with slick propaganda.

Want some more slippery drivels? Amazon actually claims that deliberately undermining retail sales of books is a *good* thing which will strengthen publishing by encouraging readers to discover genres and books they wouldn't other-

wise know about or explore. However, since an Amazon customer is already *on* the retail page of a book when he sees the blue box offering the title secondhand, doesn't that suggest to anyone with at least the IQ of an amoeba that the customer therefore *already* knows about that genre and went to that page due to *already* being interested in that author and/or that book?

Media Flap

Media attention around this destructive bookseller practice and the publishing community's responses to it have included not only major print journals, but also online reports and television coverage, too. A particularly interesting online article even challenged Amazon's insistence that the blue boxes are a service to customers. The author of this business article postulated that Amazon is effectively destroying its own brand name identity by urging its own customers to buy books from a bewildering variety of unregulated suppliers via the blue boxes, and also making a previously simple book-buying process more complicated now—complicated enough that many customers may desert Amazon in favor of other online booksellers. According to another online journal, Amazon's stock continued declining after the appearance of the blue boxes, ultimately losing about 80 percent of its value over the course of the entire year.

One might suppose that Amazon would almost certainly remove the blue boxes, and very soon, given its falling stock prices and all the negative publicity surrounding this new policy. However, it remains to be seen whether or not that will indeed happen. After all, numbers-crunching suggests that the blue boxes create a profitable middleman income for the still-unprofitable company, and with relatively little investment of time, effort, or staff. In addition, Amazon may actually believe the old saying that there's no such thing as bad publicity. Finally, Internet culture is a strange and evolving thing, and Amazon may well feel that the establishment of yet another hyperlink system to its overall entity is more important than the current storm of protest—which it perhaps expects will die down any moment, anyhow.

As for me, I now find myself hoping, for the first time ever, that a bookseller will soon go out of business—and in such a spectacular nose-dive of failure that every other online retail bookseller becomes extremely leery of repeating any of its mistakes.

Curmudgeon Seeks Anecdotes For Future Column: Please send me, via post or e-mail, accounts of the strangest, most amusing, or most bizarre letters you've ever gotten from readers or from others contacting you in your capacity as a novelist. Also, please be sure to advise me clearly if you want to be anonymous. Send to: LaResnick@aol.com, or Laura Resnick, P.O. Box 20012, Cincinnati, OH, 45220.

MEMBER NEWS.....Compiled by Kathy Chwedyk

Sam Spade With Hairballs

According to author Carole Nelson Douglas, cat detective Midnight Louie, whom she describes as "Sam Spade with hairballs," has always said he oughta be in pictures, and now someone agrees. His mystery series has been optioned for development as a television series by International Television Group (ITG), which produced the recent Emmy Award-winning version of Tennessee Williams' play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, starring Jessica Lange, Tommy Lee Jones, Rip Torn, and Kim Stanley, which aired on Showtime and PBS.

The Midnight Louie mystery series ("Remington Steele with two couples and a cat," quips Douglas) will have 27 books in all. It's a mystery/humor/relationship series with a continuing backstory à la *The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Louie, an alley-cat sleuth that Douglas describes as adding a "first-furperson" narration to the plotlines, provides the element of fantasy prevalent in today's most popular TV series. The concept features two men and two women who are both professional and amateur crime-solvers, a romantic quadrangle, and all the zany secondary characters and backgrounds that modern Las Vegas offers.

Speaking of cross-genre appeal, *Cat in a Jeweled Jumpsuit*, a Midnight Louie-meets-Elvis book, was a finalist for both the *Romantic Times* amateur sleuth mystery and the Cat Writers' Association novel awards in November. *Probe*, Douglas's 1985 mainstream/SF love story, made *Romantic Times* magazine's 200 All-time Favorites list.

Taylor Makes Top 200

Janelle Taylor's novel, *Not Without You*, was listed in Ingram's "Top 200 Bestselling Romances."

Book Club News

Cheryl Anne Porter's March St. Martin's Press title, *Wild Flower*, an historical romantic suspense, recently was selected by Doubleday Rhapsody for its romance book club. Rhapsody will do a spotlight piece on Porter for the April catalog.

Australian Author Sherry-Anne Jacobs (writing as Anna Jacobs) has announced that Book Club Associates (BCA) in the United Kingdom has put in a second order for her novel, *Lancashire Lass*, this time to use for promos aimed at gaining more members. In addition, BCA bought her next book, *Our Polly*, to sell to its members.

Another Column for Resnick

Laura Resnick has recently been invited to become an opinion columnist for the *SFWA Bulletin*, which is nationally distributed and available at major local newsstands. Since Resnick is opinionated enough to fill two regular columns (and then some), she will still continue as *Novelists' Ink's* Comely Curmudgeon. Nor does she intend to give up her day job just yet (e.g., fiction).

Top Ten Contemporary

Sandra Kitt's July release, *Close Encounters*, is listed among the Top Ten Contemporaries for 2000 (the No. 5 position). Amazon.com also listed *Significant Others* (Signet 1996) among the Top Romances for the 20th Century.

In 2000 Kitt also was nominated in two categories for Lifetime Achievement Awards from *Romantic Times* magazine: Contemporary, and Multicultural Contemporary. She received the award for the Multicultural category.

Please send news for this column to Kathy Chwedyk at KChwed@aol.com or 1215 Fairmont Ct., Algonquin, IL 60102.

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