

Reversion of Rights: NETWORKING EQUALS NET GAINS

By Judy Gill

What happens when a once-successful line of books is deemed by its publisher to be dead, and a large number of authors are “orphaned?”

Most find other houses to publish their work. Some stay on with the company, writing different kinds of books, often with great success. But what happens to the *rights* to the books in that defunct line? Who owns them, and for how long?

For me and for many Loveswept authors, that question arose when the Bantam Doubleday Dell Group discontinued the Loveswept line. Many authors wanted the rights to their out-of-print Loveswept and Fanfare titles reverted so they could resell the material for reprint, large print, or electronic editions. Some of us made this

request soon after the line was canceled. Since my first Loveswept titles had come out a decade earlier, I sent my initial letter in the early part of 1998, requesting reversion for those books that were up to seven years old (mistakenly thinking that was the standard term that had to pass before reversion could take effect).

It went unanswered as, it turned out, did most such requests. Maybe our letters had been sent to the wrong departments. Maybe the people who received them had no idea of what to do with them. Maybe there were other reasons. I doubt we’ll ever know.

Denied Outright

The letters that were acknowledged brought news that the requests for reversion were denied outright because BDD claimed they had hopes of putting some authors’ backlist into reprint. But which authors? And when? That was never made clear. In most cases, the officials had apparently dug in their collective heels, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. The authors who insisted were reminded there was no legal requirement for the return of their rights. A check of the Loveswept boilerplate contract showed this to be

true. There was no provision for rights reversion, at all, ever, even if the publisher stopped producing the line.

Enter the indomitable Kay Hooper, who, though under contract with the company and risking peril to her own future there, began to gather information into a central pool. She contacted those whose e-mail addresses she knew, looking for volunteers to track down the other former authors of the two lines to see how they were faring in their professional dealings with the company.

When Kay first contacted me, while I didn’t think I had any money coming to me since I had quit writing for the line two years before its demise, I was certainly willing to help bring other former Loveswept authors into the fold if it meant a chance of regaining my rights. I agreed to take a portion of the author list and reach as many people on it as I could.

Thanks to the Internet, e-mail, and networking all over North America, we managed to compile a fairly comprehensive roster. During the next several months, it kept on growing as members contacted friends and acquaintances they’d known to write

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

Rediscover the Magic

It's a hot summer afternoon and you're a child, all alone in the house. The windows are open; the screens filter in the hum of cicadas and the wind-borne laughter of a stickball game in progress around the corner. You don't want to join the game, though. Nor do you want to watch TV or listen to your sister's "Meet the Beatles" LP. You've got the entire house to yourself, and peace and solitude are treasures you aren't going to squander.

You grab a box of Cheerios and a glass of milk, and climb into a comfortable chair with a book. That book is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, or *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn*, or *Alice In Wonderland*, or some other story about a girl, stubborn and courageous, having adventures girls don't usually get to experience in your school reading assignments. You devour Cheerios and this book in a state of total rapture.

Or maybe you don't read a book about a stubborn, courageous girl having adventures. You grab an apple instead of Cheerios, a bottle of Yoohoo instead of milk, and the book is *Stranger In A Strange Land*, read while sprawled out on an old army blanket under a tree in the backyard. Or it's root beer, pretzels, and Louis L'Amour in the hayloft of the barn. Or sourballs and Agatha Christie beneath the covers at night, with a flashlight. Or, like Francie Nolan in *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn*, you carry a plate of pink-iced pastries onto the fire escape and read a library book high above a Brooklyn sidewalk.

No matter what the book and where you read it, you are transfixed. You're eight, or eleven, or fourteen, and you realize that someone picked up a pen or sat at a typewriter and strung these words together, and somehow, magically, they have changed your life.

I love being a writer. More than love it—it keeps me alive, like breathing, eating, and hugging my kids. But as a professional, I've lost the magic of reading. I fear that maybe we all have.

When Ninc members talk, it's too rarely about the ecstasy of diving into a book and letting its tide carry us away. When we read, we have in the back of our minds: "How did this thing make the *Times* extended list?" or "I hear she got mid-six figures for this book," or "I remember when he was whining on the e-mail loop about how blocked he was with this manuscript." Our reading is colored by our knowledge of the writing process: "What a cool use of Linda Seger's concept of metaphor," or "There's one of those plot points Dwight Swain talks about."

How can we get back the unfettered joy of reading that we knew as children? I'm not sure. But it would be nice, every now and then, to forget about six-figure deals and plot points and simply curl up in a comfortable chair with a favorite snack and a book and let the sheer miracle of the story transport us.

We spend so much time educating ourselves, analyzing novels and enlightening each other about the business and technical aspects of writing. And that's important. But it's also important sometimes to forget everything we know so we can rediscover the magic that made us want to become writers in the first place.

— **Barbara Keiler**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Letters to the Editor 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.

In Order to Get What I Want

In her president's column in the February issue of *NINK*, Barbara Keiler writes: "What if Novelists, Inc. could do one thing for you that it's not already doing?"

I agree with Barbara that ten years is a long time, and what we need and want from Ninc may have changed or multiplied since its foundation. It's an excellent issue for us to discuss and debate as an organization now that we're just over ten years old.

And I strongly suggest that the best way to implement whatever changes you (the individual or the majority) want to see in Ninc is to do it yourself.

I wanted a few things in our annual conference that I wasn't getting, so I chaired the 1997 New York City conference and implemented them there. I wanted to learn about cover art, and the newsletter wasn't covering it, so I volunteered to research and write a five-part series about covers which appeared in *NINK* (September 1995 through March 1996).

In Ninc's early days, when I wanted things which Ninc simply couldn't afford, Sally McCluskey and I agreed to found a fundraising committee which considered various possibilities.

When I wanted to see more diversity in the genres which

Ninc's membership represented, I agreed, along with Susan Elizabeth Phillips, to found the first Outreach Committee. When Vicki Lewis Thompson asked me to act as assistant editor on *NINK*, I realized this was an opportunity to think up topics I was interested in and find the best people to write those articles. When asked to serve on the Nominating Committee, I recognized it as an opportunity to propose people whose sense and abilities I admire for Ninc's Board of Directors.

I'm not one of Ninc's most valuable or hard-working members. (I'd name just a few of them off the top of my head—like, oh, Janice Young Brooks, Victoria Thompson, Terey daly Ramin, Carla Neggers, Kay Hooper, Marianne Shock—but that might embarrass them, so I won't.) However, as someone who has at least contributed something here and there to Ninc over the years in order to get what I want out of it, I have no patience with or sympathy for anyone who says "I want" without also saying "and I'll do."

If you want something from Ninc which you're not getting, the best way to get it is to work for it, rather than to say, "This is what I want—and now someone else should go work for it."

— **Laura Resnick**

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).

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

Robin Bayne, Lutherville, MD

Heidi Betts, Kylertown, PA

Mary Bly (*Eloisa James*), Summit, NJ

Laura Parker Castoro (*Laura Parker*), Coppell, TX

Darlene Gardenhire (*Darlene Graham*), Norman, OK

Katherine Grills (*Katherine Greyle*), Champaign, IL

Linda Hall, Fredericton, NB, Canada

Debra Mullins Manning (*Debra Mullins*), Waldick, NJ

New Members

Roxanne Rustand, Cedar Rapids, IA

Ellen Godfrey, Victoria, BC, Canada

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



BREAKING NEWS

COMPILED BY
PAMELA BROWNING

Amazon Watch

Amazon, which has so far failed to make a profit, recently reported fourth-quarter sales and losses within estimates and announced it would lay off 15 percent of its work force. The move axes 1,300 jobs and will close a distribution center in McDonough, GA, as well as a customer-service center in Seattle, site of Amazon headquarters.

The good news is that CEO Jeff Bezos has decided not to proceed with a plan calling for employees to sign a "nondisparagement" agreement in exchange for better severance packages. The bad news is that his leniency applies only to hourly workers. Corporate-level staff will still be asked to sign the agreement before receiving the full severance sum.

As if it didn't have enough going on, Amazon discovered its banner ads running on a website backed by Hezbollah, the Iran-linked terrorist organization that has declared war against "the Zionist enemy." The website belongs to Manar TV, a Lebanese television station, and Amazon pulled the ads.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish watchdog group that monitors the Internet for anti-Semitic content, spotted the ads, along with some for Microsoft. Amazon and Microsoft stated that Manar TV was able to use the ads by joining affiliate programs.

Amazon spokesperson Patti Smith said, "They applied for participation in our associates program and just said they were a Lebanese television station." Amazon, which has more than 600,000 websites in the program, does not review each one and relies on sites to abide by Amazon guidelines prohibiting members from being associated with violent or illegal activity.

So then, with that flap contained and as his company's ▶ ▶ ▶

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▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 1*

Loveswept/Fanfare novels for BDD. A surprising number of people had done so.

What we learned once we were all talking together was both startling and disturbing. Royalty statements sent out by the company appeared to bear small resemblance to any reality the authors could see. Numbers of books sold, numbers held in reserve, earn-outs, foreign sales, none of it stacked up quite the way it should. A disquieting picture began to emerge, one with many gaps, like a jigsaw puzzle with pieces missing, and no cover-picture on the box to use as a guide.

Requesting RTPs

Something had to be done to complete that picture. That something was for each of us to request a Reconciliation to Print (RTP) for our titles. This gleaned an explanation that the accounting department was in a state of confusion and flux, due to a change in computer systems and woefully short staffing. Information would be difficult if not impossible for them to find. Things would take time. It seemed to be one of those "Don't call us, we'll call you," situations.

With Kay's quiet encouragement that we work as a group, always remembering "it isn't our fault that the publisher doesn't have enough people on the payroll to do the work required," she recommended that Loveswept Loop, as we began calling ourselves, keep asking pointed questions and demanding more information, "as politely as possible," but since we were all entitled to the information, not to stop asking.

We soon realized that repeated questions by individuals to the company were getting little if any serious attention. Some authors reported

things such as receiving statements that showed thousands of copies for "affiliates" for which they had not been paid, but their requests for further explanation weren't answered. Nor were their demands for rights reversions or other positive action receiving satisfactory responses.

Deb Smith's story was just one.

She wrote: "My scenario went like this: I spent at least a year sending one simple, polite, certified-mail letter after another to (a Bantam official) ... 'I want the rights back on the following books, please. Fifteen Loveswepts, and my ancient Bantam historical.' (The official) kept sending back letters saying, essentially, 'We put a lot of effort into building your career. Please rescind your request.'"

"I sent the same letter repeatedly; she sent the same reply. Finally, I wrote to her and said, 'This is my last request. I do not intend to change my decision. Please revert my rights or tell me your reprint schedule for all of the books in question.'"

"At that point, (the official) contacted my agent, not the agent who had handled all the books in question, mind you, but my *new* agent. I found that incredibly patronizing and insulting on her part, and felt it put my new agent in an awkward position.

"My new agent suggested that I send (the official) an amended list of books, a sort of goodwill compromise that allowed Bantam to retain rights to some books but revert others to me. I carefully compiled a list and sent it off.

"(The official)'s reaction was immediate. No more Ms. Nice Guy. She said Bantam would go back to press on every one of my books and put them all on the market in about twelve nanoseconds, if I didn't back off. (I'm paraphrasing, of course)," Deb added.

"I was furious. I could have saved myself a lot of letters if I'd known she



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never had any intention of cooperating. All I got was a good ol' fashioned arm-twisting.

"I've decided to let the matter rest, at least for now. None of my old books have yet been reprinted except the historical. My former agent, who was always eager to please Bantam, sent me a congratulatory e-mail about the historical, which as far as I'm concerned was just adding insult to injury. I wrote back and said, 'Thanks, but I'd rather have had the rights reverted when I asked for them.'

"I'm happy to report that my new publisher, Little, Brown & Company, has very precise and reasonable terms regarding the rights and reprinting of my novels. I'll never sign another contract like the ones Bantam foisted on me."

Deb said in an e-mail to me when I was researching this article, "Let me know if you need any other info. Feel free to use my name, since I'll never write for Bantam again. Never. It's a matter of honor and the ethical treatment of authors. I don't mind being quoted."

Our Plan Of Action

In light of this hard-line approach by the company, what was needed, it appeared, was an even more concerted effort, a plan of action by the authors. But, could a small group of writers, though genuinely concerned over the possibility of not having received their due, and not making any headway in getting what seemed a moral, if not legal, right to control their own work, take on a big publishing company?

The answer was yes.

On advice from various agents, many of us dug through old files for facts, figures, and dates; compiled these into a logical order; then asked

even more direct questions and demanded answers. We wrote nearly identical double-registered letters to the Contracts Department, copied to Bantam's General Counsel, again requesting reversion of rights and Reconciliation to Print. They were worded something like this:

"The government requires me to keep complete paperwork on each title for tax purposes. Hence, I must make certain that your records tally with mine. I am therefore requesting a complete accounting of foreign sales and royalties and other subrights for each title listed on the attached page. I also again request reversion of all rights to the books I wrote for BDD."

Some of those requests were met during this second go-round. Mine was very polite and is quoted here in part:

Dear Ms. Gill:

Reference is made to your agreements with Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Publishing Group, Inc. now Random House, Inc. (the "Agreements") for rights in the above mentioned works (the "Works").

We hereby consent to the termination of the Agreements and to the reversion of the rights granted to us thereunder. The foregoing is, of course, subject to outstanding licenses granted to Bantam's sublicenses, Bantam's right to renew such sublicenses, Bantam's rights to indemnification in the Agreements, and to our continuing right to sell whatever stock we have on hand or may reacquire.

We may still have reproduction material on hand for the Works. If so, it will be available to purchase from us for a period of one year from the date of termination. Should you license rights in the Works elsewhere, please inform the buyer to direct inquiries, in writing, to our Managing Editorial Department.

A list of my 23 Loveswepts and one Fanfare was attached.

I'd have been willing to



stock price approached a 52-week low, CEO Bezos sent out a company-wide e-mail proclaiming it was now time to "Get the Crap Out." (This articulate guy was *Time's* Person of the Year in 1999?)

Anyway, Bezos was referring to eliminating product categories, not, um, anything else. Not that there was anything else. Not that they've been shoveling a lot of it lately.

Reports have indicated that home and hardware have been the company's least profitable, and Bezos wants to "turbo-charge" book sales, focus on "digital delivery," and implement the "Amazon.com Honor System," an online payment service that can be outsourced to other websites. Using Amazon's one-click technology, its 29 million registered customers will be able to buy goods on third-party sites with transactions as small as one dollar.

In yet another move to beef up the company's bottom line, Amazon will charge publishers to publicize books in e-mail promotions sent to customers.

Wall Street's Lehman Brothers analyst Ravi Suria, calling Amazon "a distress story," reports that Amazon is low on cash and predicts that the company will run out of it in the third quarter.

Not To Be Outdone...

Barnes & Noble.com reported fourth-quarter losses that exceeded expectations and unexpectedly laid off 350 employees throughout the company, about sixteen percent of its workforce.

Put On Your Red Dress, Baby

The new Harlequin/Silhouette City Girls line has been oddly rechristened Red Dress Ink. (Don't ask me, I only report the news.)

Unofficial word is that they're planning a November launch and have bought three books, two of them written in the





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first person. Covers and distribution reportedly will be handled by Mira, Harlequin's single-title line.

Submit proposals to Red Dress Ink, c/o Margaret O'Neill Marbury, 300 E. 42nd St., 6th Floor, NY 10017.

Frankfurt E-Book Awards

The International e-Book Award Foundation has issued new criteria for the second annual Frankfurt e-Book Awards.

Instead of offering a lavish prize of \$100,000 for a single top winner this year, two \$50,000 Grand Prizes will be awarded, one each for a fiction and nonfiction title. Prizes of \$10,000 will also be offered for Best Fiction e-Book, Best Nonfiction e-Book and Best e-Book Technology.

Silhouette Specials—Sunk?

That was the rumor. Here's the official response from the Harlequin/Silhouette Q-Team spokesperson, Denise O'Sullivan:

"Silhouette Special Edition, with its unique blend of romance, emotion, and compelling realism that readers so enjoy, is thriving and has even had two titles on *The New York Times* bestseller list in recent years."

Xlibris Layoffs

Xlibris.com, the online publishing company 49 percent owned by Random House, recently laid off ten middle managers, according to a report by Inside.com.

"We found ourselves top-heavy," CEO John Feldcamp said, adding, "We're just moving around the dollars to where it's most effective."

The wages saved by the company will be used to hire new customer-service and operations staff, "the people who actually take care of the customers," Feldcamp said.

Note to laid-off Amazon and B&N employees: Submit job applications to Xlibris.

More Amazon, Uh, Crud
Books in Canada, one



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accept this, because, as I said, I didn't expect any money from them, and at least I had my rights back. Then, several months later, I received a check for a book I had never known to be translated into a foreign language. This transaction had not showed up on any of my statements, nor did it appear in the next royalty period.

More Questions Than Answers

Now I had a lot more questions than answers.

I wrote again. A further request for an RTP garnered me a sheaf of papers from the contracts department, many of which did not match with earlier statements that bore the same dates. Perhaps the different format because of the change in computer program was responsible for this, but in any case, I'm no accountant and I couldn't find much correlation. There was also a note that this was only a partial accounting because some files were "missing."

There was no explanation offered as to where, when, or how they had disappeared, nor was there a suggestion that the matter was being looked into. Just, "Sorry, some of the stuff pertaining to your contracts with us is gone," or words to that effect. End of story.

Meanwhile, on the Loop, reports of small payments had begun trickling in as though, maybe, after all, the accounting department was beginning to get its act together.

Mostly, though, the Loveswept Loop reported more apparent company stonewalling. I, like many others, was willing to give up. However,

Kay's persistence and determination to help the rest of us get whatever was owed us, despite the knowledge that she might be jeopardizing her own position, kept us going. A few powerful agents and legal advisors were brought into play. Some spoke off the record to unnamed higher-ups in the company, suggesting that perhaps it would be in the publisher's best interests not to continue obstructing the authors in their desires, as an audit might not be to the company's advantage.

Many of us were willing, by this time, to ante up and pay for legal advice should it become necessary. But one more try the nice way wouldn't hurt. This time, we again wrote letters designed to arrive in New York as close to the same day as possible. We asked not just for RTP, but for a final accounting, including foreign sales.

Meantime, we heard from a jubilant Glenna McReynolds. "Hey Loop," she wrote, "much to my surprise, I got a check for \$1,000.00. It's been a year since I wrote my request, and I was figuring it was about time to send it again...It was mostly from a missed foreign sale on one Loveswept, with a few odds and ends, including \$15 or so on the very first book I ever sold way back in 1987."

This was good news to all of us; then, shortly following that, in November, 2000, to my shock I received a check from Random House in the amount of \$13,208. This included \$75 from "reserves held in error" due on my very first Loveswept title, which, like Glenna's, was a 1987 book. Another, from a couple of years later, gleaned me

\$16.27 in missed subrights income. Then came \$90—another reserve held in error. There was \$165 on one, again for reserve held in error; \$4,146.85 more for revised subrights; as well as \$178.95 and a whopping \$8,535.93 for the same type of error.

Rushing To The Bank

Stunned, I rushed to the bank while still not sure I wasn't dreaming. Then, a couple of weeks later, another pleasant surprise—my former agent, who had represented eight of my Loveswepts, sent me an additional check, not quite as impressive, but bringing the whole total up to well over \$15,000 in back payments.

Another author of 22 Loveswepts had a different story to tell. Earlier, she'd reported receiving an RTP on all 22 books, along with a check for \$782.00 in August, 2000. It had taken over a year to get that far. "The RTP showed 40,145 copies sold. My royalty statement showed 38,306 copies sold and paid to me. I asked why I wasn't paid on the additional 1,839 copies, and they paid me.

"There was no letter enclosed with the check. I was really looking forward to some honest answers. I sent back twelve and a half pages of questions, and (as a result), around November 28, 2000, received another check for \$1,164.08. I e-mailed them back asking why all questions weren't answered. They were still researching, they said. I questioned them again in December, 2000. Their response, which was prompt, was they were continuing to look into my files. So yes, I'm still waiting for answers."

They're *still* researching? This author's still waiting? After how long? And for how much longer?

Kay Hooper said recently, "I really want to commend all the Loveswept authors for sticking together and working in a patient and reasonable manner in order to obtain from the publisher information and monies owed to them.

"Despite considerable provocation along the way, their efforts have remained courteous and entirely professional. And those efforts are proving successful. I used to think that getting

any group of writers to work together for a common goal would be a bit like herding cats, but this group has proved me wrong. Brava, ladies!"

Brava, Kay!

Deliberate Obfuscation?

Do I think any of this was deliberate obfuscation on Bantam's part? In the matter of reversion of rights—yes, in my opinion, the company did not willingly return those to anyone. They made it extremely difficult to obtain them by ignoring the applicants and impeding them in other ways.

Do I think the accounting errors were deliberate? The answer is an unequivocal no.

Do I think careless accounting practices were to blame? Yes.

Do I think that, if Random House hadn't taken over from the Bantam Doubleday Group, I, or any of the rest of us, would have ever seen a cent of the money due us? No, I do not.

Not only do I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Kay Hooper, author of so many books I've lost count, who is still under contract with Random House's Bantam division and doing them proud with her titles appearing regularly on *The New York Times* bestseller list, I commend the staff of the current accounting department for their help, honesty, and efficiency in righting an old wrong. I hope that in the final outcome, all former Loveswept authors will be as close to satisfied as I am.

Note, I said "close to." I'm querying the company about interest on the funds that were wrongly withheld, and I will keep you posted.

I also have one more question to which I'm determined to get an answer: That statement I received from Random House notes that in the case of one of my titles, *Forbidden Dreams*, they require a copy of the final royalty statement to do the review. Now, if they don't have that, who the heck does?

Judy Gill has gone on to publish with Harlequin and several other houses since leaving the Loveswept line. Her next book, a futuristic romance, will be released by Leisure Lovespell in April.



BREAKING NEWS



of Canada's oldest literary magazines, will license old reviews to Amazon.com for electronic publication on the Amazon website. After the magazine ceased publishing last year due to a lack of funding, it was resurrected as the result of a deal with Amazon; *Books in Canada* will provide Amazon with reviews of books written by Canadians and license archived reviews in exchange for sponsorship.

The Periodical Writers Association of Canada (PWAC), which represents Canadian freelance writers, has responded with outrage to the move, asking that writers and readers alike boycott the publication until copyright issues have been addressed.

PWAC president Kathe Liebe said, "Adrian Stein (*Books in Canada's* owner and publisher) does not have the right to publish or license those reviews electronically. Over the past year he has flagrantly violated the copyright of scores of writers across Canada by posting their work on his website and is now 'licensing' that work to Amazon.com. It's outrageous."

PWAC requested that Stein remove their work or obtain permission, but he refused.

Musical Chairs

At Harlequin/Silhouette, New York, Kim Nadelson has been promoted to associate editor reporting to Tracy Farrell. Darlene Winter has been hired as assistant editor reporting to Leslie Wainger. All NY editors can acquire for all series generated from that office.

The Plant Bore \$\$\$

Stephen King's website reports that he netted a \$463,832 profit on the six installments of his online serial novel, *The Plant*.

Agency Merger

The William Morris and Virginia Barber literary agencies have merged. Virginia Barber is reachable at (212) 586-5100. **Cont. on p. 11** ▶ ▶ ▶

I'm sure you think your mailbox simply can't handle one more e-zine or newsletter, but Leslie King (**Leslie.King@Scotland.com**, or **Booklesliworm@AOL.com**) pens a delightful newsletter that provides useful information for writers. Each month, "The Author's Almanac" includes an article on writing, a listing of websites, and my favorite section, "Curious Fact of the Day." With permission, I'm sharing excerpts from the newsletter as well as information on how to subscribe.

The Author's Almanac

HELPFUL WEBSITES!

Dave Wilton's Etymology Page

<http://www.wilton.net/etyma.htm>

Great source of words and phrases and when and why they came into use.

Castle Learning Center

<http://www.castles-of-britain.com/castle6.htm>

Wonderful source of castle information from terms to way of life. Excellent site.

The Mystica

<http://www.themystica.com/>

An online encyclopedia of the occult, mysticism, magic, paranormal, and more. Informative site for all you SF/Fantasy people.

Also, if you are working on your own web pages, here is a good site with tons of links for buttons, logos, clip-art and more! <http://freegraphics.com/>

Curious Fact Of The Day

Why do Xs at the end of the letter signify kisses?

In the Middle Ages, when many people were unable to read or write, documents were often signed using an X. Kissing the X represented an oath to fulfill obligations specified in the document. The X and the kiss eventually became synonymous.

For a free copy of The Author's Almanac, send a blank e-mail to: **Authors_Almanac@Sendfree.com**

Rights Reversion

Several authors on Ninlink had questions about getting the rights to their books reverted back to them. Linda R. Barlow let us know that the Authors Guild provides information on rights reversion at <http://www.backinprint.com/rightsget.html>. "The page gives basic information on how to get your rights back and also links to a sample letter and sample form for the publisher to sign reverting rights."

Artwork

Janelle Taylor brings to our attention that Elaine Gigniliat has a website, www.romancebookcoverart.com/, "where she's selling signed or unsigned prints of the original

artwork. Good prices. I have one of her original paintings, which was expensive, and one of her signed prints, which is excellent quality. If you can't afford a painting (and she's very high), a print might interest you. All authors' names and paintings are featured there."

Organize Your E-Mail

From Jo Beverly: "In case anyone is unaware of this, most mail readers allow you to set up folders to collect messages from any particular group. I have one for Ninlink as well as all my other e-group lists. That way, I don't use digests, but my e-mail isn't all jumbled together. When necessary I can prioritize which I read. It takes a little longer to flick through twenty individual messages than to page down through a digest, but not much, and it means that if I have time to read my mail I can be up-to-date on it instead of waiting for a digest to generate."

Research

Joyce Marlow recently "found a good site for worldwide language translations, including indigenous people, worldwide oral pronunciation of words (using call wave), sign language, Braille, and an online translation service. Martindale's Resource Desk, www-sci.lib.uci.edu/HSG/Language.html, also has useful info like rhyming words, quotations, a thesaurus, and links as diverse as maritime research to global lightning distributions to theater companies. It's a huge site and well worth the time to investigate."

Promotion

From Terey daly Ramin and Lois Faye Dyer: "Anyone interested in accessing a current list of reviewers maintained by RIO (Reviewers International Organization) can find it at: www.geocities.com/bookreviewers." The site provides an extensive list of reviewers, the types of books they review, what publications or sites they review for, and an e-mail address for contact.

From Dawn Reno: "If you'd like to get your website out there a little more, there's a new directory that just contacted me and is looking to list other authors as well as any other interesting sites. E-mail address is: **webmaster@wwwdirectory.net**."

Susan Wiggs reminded us of Modern Postcard, www.modernpostcard.com. The site not only gives you information for ordering postcards from them, but offers to send the postcards to your mailing list. Susan found the company reasonably priced and wonderful to work with.

The following is information that Susan Wiggs told us about The Book Wizard Promotional Services for Authors, www.book-wizard.net.

"The Book Wizard can help authors with many promotional services including:

"Bookseller Mailings, consisting of Cover Letter, Flyer, and Readers' Group Questions.

"Database of over 500 bookstores including *Romantic Times*' Bookstores That Care. Cost: \$1/each bookstore to \$1.50/each bookstore (if cover flats are included). My database is now up to 597 stores, including chain stores, independent new stores, new/used, used, and 41 readers' groups. All have been recommended by romance readers or writers as romance-friendly.

"ARC Creation and Distribution

"Takes your manuscript and makes into faux galleys for distribution to Internet reviewers (over 100 reviewers). Cost: unbound (including mailing) \$8/each; bound \$10/each.

"Readers' Group Questions.

"Questions suitable for discussion made from your book. These are posted at the website www.romancebookgroup.com and promoted via different Internet readers' lists. Cathie Linz mentioned the site in her January RT column and will again be mentioning it in the March RT along with the new URL. To see samples of her reading group questions, see <http://www.geocities.com/readersgroup/page16.html>. Cost: \$30/book.

"All clients are automatically included in the *Book Wizard News*, sent out to bookstores and Internet readers' groups approximately six times/year. In addition, the newsletter is distributed at reader conferences (1,000 copies were included in the goody bags for the recent *Romantic Times* conference in Houston). A sample is on the website. Cost: NO CHARGE.

"Other services include: Writing Press Releases, Press Kits, Scheduling Booksignings, Promotion of Booksignings, Promotion of Contests, Internet 'Clip Service.'

"Contact: Maureen Wachsmith at bookwizard@bigfoot.com"

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Moderators: If You Have Questions, E-Mail:

Brenda Hiatt-Barber	BrendaHB@aol.com
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Patricia de la Fuente	Patricia@hiline.net
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Lorraine Heath	LorraineHe@aol.com
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Just For Fun! Real Magic!

Amazing! When the deadline looms and you need a break, check out www.netlaughter.com/cardtrick.htm. I'm sure it's a psychological trick, but I couldn't figure it out. I could ask my son, the magician, but I already know what he would say (with a knowing grin): "It's magic." One word of caution: while it's processing, go ahead and click to Continue. Otherwise, like me, you might sit there staring at it for five minutes.

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—Jan. 2001

The words "et al" following an author's name indicate that the book was written with other authors who are not members of Ninc.

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

Jo Beverly, *An Unwilling Bride*, Zebra

Sandra Brown, *In a Class by Itself*, Bantam

Sandra Brown, *Riley in the Morning*, Bantam

Shirlee Busbee, *At Long Last*, Warner

Catherine Coulter, *The Scottish Bride*, Jove

Millie Criswell, *The Trouble with Mary*, Ivy

Claire Delacroix, *The Beauty*, Island

Christiane Heggan, *Blind Faith*, Mira

Linda Howard, *Tears of the Renegade*, Mira

Jayne Ann Krentz, *Lost & Found*, Putnam

Linda Lael Miller, *Two Brothers: The Lawman and the Gunslinger*, Pocket Star

Patricia Potter, *The Perfect Family*, Berkley

Julia Quinn, *The Viscount Who Loved Me*, Avon

Christie Ridgway, *This Perfect Kiss*, Avon

Nora Roberts, *Heart of the Sea*, Jove

Nora Roberts, *The Stanislawski Brothers*, Silhouette

Kristine Rofofson, et al, *Tyler Brides*, Harlequin

Amanda Scott, *Border Storm*, Zebra

Susan Wiggs, *The You I Never Knew*, Warner

Having grid withdrawal? The full grid format of "Fast Track" is at the website: www.ninc.com



VANCOUVER 2000

CONFERENCE REPORTS

These reports were filed by Olivia Rupprecht, who writes as Mallory Rush.

Dangerous Games: Suspense, Romantic Suspense, and Thrillers (Night Owl Session #2)

Who? What? When? Where? How? *Hub?*

A la *Cool Hand Luke*, it seems we have a failure to communicate when it comes to what's what in these kissing-cousin genres. While there's ample confusion amongst writers in clear-cut definitions, booksellers and publishers and readers are the ones who decide what gets published, where it gets shelved, and who's gonna buy the goods. The collective scratching of their own heads can create one heck of a migraine for the poor writer who's simply trying to get a sellable and compelling story into the right market and subsequently into the right hands.

How best to do this? First, try to grasp the differences under the umbrella of suspense. Not easy when the diversity falls like so many raindrops (make that a downpour) onto the page: Romantic suspense; woman in jeopardy; medical; psychological; military; techno; legal thriller; straight suspense; the list goes on.

Okay, now add into this convoluted equation the difference between mystery and suspense. With a fine line sometimes separating the two, one attendee said she'd heard that mysteries appeal to the intellect and suspense/thrillers play on the emotions. You know, those creepy-crawly feelings, the "don't go in there" gut reactions because "Yikes!" he/she might not get out alive.

Mysteries, however, usually offer a less emotive challenge, an invitation to play chess with the writer's brain and figure out who really done it while wading through a stream of red herrings.

Unfortunately those red herrings have made their way into the bookstores when it comes to pointing readers the way of suspense. Alas, for the most part, suspense doesn't have a specific space for the shelving. And what's a publisher to do when suspense can cross such a variety of genres? Apologize to unhappy readers if they happen to purchase a suspense that's been shelved in mystery; say "sorry" to mystery fans when there's no mystery to solve because the story's really a thriller? Maybe kiss the girls and make them cry because they expected a prominent relationship that didn't come to pass in a "romantic suspense" that left out the romance?

What a mess! For once publishers and booksellers, writers and readers are all on the same page, desperately hoping that someone, somewhere, will once and for all solve this seemingly unsolvable mystery.

Er, I mean, suspense. As for what kind, take your pick—and by all means, take your time picking through the shelves.

Electronic Publishing: The New Frontier

Nancy Martin, president of Novels Now, moderating. Those-In-The-Know panel: Alan Kaufman (Ninc counsel and electronic publishing guru representing publishers, authors, and agents); Aliske Webb of Bookmice.com; and Claire Zion from Time Warner's iPublish.com.

Now tell me, just how many

places can you dine on sweet rolls and sip hot coffee while getting the latest scoop from such icons of the publishing biz? I must say, however, for being icons they did a darn good job of coming across as, maybe not plain folks, but definitely approachable and happy to answer any and all questions thrown their way. Since the audience was fairly knowledgeable about the basics of e-publishing, there was more interaction between them and the panel (who wanted to get author opinion/input), than one-way blah-blah-blahing.

It's interesting that despite all the e-savvy in the room, most participants had never laid eyes on an actual e-reading device. Claire Zion treated us to a show-and-tell demo, then passed around her high-tech toy. The Rocket eBook Reader was pretty cool but a bit awkward to work—unless you spend a lot of time playing Nintendo. Maybe that's why publishers are zeroing in on the young adult market, which T.W. is predicting will be huge, and consider people under thirty their major target audience.

There seemed to be two divergent areas of discussion that commanded everyone's interest: The nitty-gritty stuff like money and contractual terms; and creative freedom. The old art vs. commerce tug-of-war was not an issue, however, since both sides appeared to be pulling on the same end of the rope: establishing fair terms while freeing up the creative restraints of traditional paper publishing.

If anyone came across as being the "bad guys," it was e-pub distributors. Claire Zion did a lot of finger-pointing at the middlemen eating into profits, Barnes and Noble the primary offenders. Would you

believe those greedy little suckers want fifty percent of e-Book proceeds? It was acknowledged that publishers made a major mistake in giving too high of a distributor discount early on, but they're hoping to correct it with new e-book distributors vying for business, effectively knocking B&N's monopoly loose. Amazon is expected to be a big competitor, with those with a nose for money to be made not far behind.

Of course no one's going to make a lot of the green stuff until the reading devices are cheap and pleasing to the eye. Given Microsoft's commitment to making that happen—and Gemstar vying for the same customers—The Big Bang of e-publishing (and the resulting bucks) is inevitable; the only question is—when?

Alan, ever the voice of reason and author advocate, cautioned authors not to give up their backlists easily since they provide more bargaining power. He also advised that while publishers should have display rights, multi-media and interactive rights are another matter, and a 50/50 split on licensing is fair.

As for reversion of rights, all agreed this was the most difficult clause. The traditional out-of-print clause is over with print-on-demand since a publisher could keep a work forever; thus, the new model is based on revenues produced—whether a publisher can continue to generate profits. Just be sure the agreed-upon amount is sufficient and don't sell your work short.

As for the more muse-ical end of e-book publication, Claire pointed out how the creative shackles were being lifted from both author and publisher while offering readers a vast array of choices unavailable in traditional print publishing. She also touched on the disappearance of the mid-list in traditional publishing, how the bestseller system keeps from building new talent and growing authors incrementally. There was a sense of excitement in the room,

tempered by some wait-and-see caution, at the prospect of forging a new frontier where, as Claire put it, "Technology and creativity are getting together and making babies."

Awww. Ain't it romantic?

The Big Commercial Novel

Featuring Sarah Gallick (Literary Guild/Bookspan) and Nita Taublib (Random House) looking cool in her shades.

Much of this session reminded me of a dog chasing its tail. An exact description of what makes a BIG COMMERCIAL NOVEL proved elusive even to those in search of the next BCN to target for *The New York Times* list. It seems that if a formula existed, there would be more of them. Once that much was established, some more yadda-yadda determined that perhaps the BIG COMMERCIAL WRITER was what really got the wheels turning and the cash registers ka-chinging.

But what's a BCW anyway? Well, gee-whillikers, if they're not a lot like those BCNs that are often nebulous and defy definition. However, this much was certain: Story elements must lift from the ordinary; there are ideas aplenty, execution is key. Acquiring editors must *love* the book and be willing to bleed for it, usually due to an adrenaline hit to the gut that shouts "this book must be read."

A suggestive hook with mass-market appeal—as well as a new twist—can produce a substantial flick of the thumb to the domino chain. Voice/chemistry, topic/subject matter can also play a pivotal role. Serendipity has been known to be a major player. Timing and luck can make all the difference since great circumstances usually have to come together to make a breakout book.

Nita Taublib suggested that writers look at their strengths rather than focus so much on what other writers are doing. That's probably sound advice, since the BCN and the BCW usually employ a lot more innovation than imitation.

Reinventing Yourself in Today's Market

This one featured Kate Seaver of Dorchester Publishing. Confession time: I was moderating this session, didn't have a tape for the recorder, my notes are sparse and almost unreadable, plus I just found out the newsletter's short on space and we need to keep this brief.

No problemo! Poor Kate was way outnumbered and proved to be a good sport about having her brain picked. Out of that gray mass she pulled this insight: "Write what you love and don't try to second-guess the market."

Victoria Thompson, Mary Jo Putney, and several others shared their experiences on career reinvention, affording us these little nuggets of gold:

Writers always need to be open to possibilities.

The only guarantee is if you give up, you won't get published.

If the career begins to unravel, the question you must ultimately answer is: Am I a writer or not?

And with those words of wisdom, we concluded this session. **NINK**



▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 7

For the Good of the Order

We suffered a dearth of humor and oddments this month, perhaps due to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which may have affected the whole industry. If, as you emerge from your winter doldrums, you find tidbits to spark up next month's column, please forward them to me at write2pam@aol.com.

— PB

Liberty, Futurity



Equity, in Philly

September 6-9, 2001
(the weekend after
Labor Day)

Adam's Mark Hotel
Philadelphia, PA
City Ave. & Monument Rd.

A Report From Our Conference Coordinator, Terey daly Ramin

Okay, so, Philadelphia? you ask with your eyebrows flying. We're having a conference in *Philadelphi*a? Why?

Because I said so, that's why. [Big impudent grin.]

Okay, no, really, here's why. Because it's a great city with a ton of historical background (and tours); fantastic shopping; food to die for (I've been reading menus today and I'm drooling, can you tell?); wonderful theaters; terrific (and inexpensive) access by *all* of the major planes, trains, and buses; and it's easy to get to by automobile.

It's also only about a long city block (all right, so maybe it's two or three reeeeaally long city blocks) from New York. Editors and agents (I asked them ;->) like this place and will come in droves. You will get not only the best and most *interesting* conference I can put together (shut up, Resnick; I know how you define that word; I'm Irish and I already live in interesting times), but you will get New York brought practically to your hotel room door. Now *there's* a bargain.

Some of the people who will appear: **Steve Zacharius** from Kensington/Zebra at his first ever Ninc conference; **Jennifer McCord**, Pacific Northwest Bookfest; **Christine Zika**, Berkley; **Malle Vallik**, Harlequin Web; **Damaris Rowland** of the Damaris Rowland Agency (who's promised to take us into the world of women's fiction and help us to plot how we can take it where we want it to go!—*Thank you, Damaris!*); and stand-up comic **Brian Kiley** of *The Conan O'Brien Show* has agreed to speak at our Saturday dinner. I told you we'd have fun.

Some of the things we're working on:

A pre-conference trip to New York via well-appointed club coaches for those who'd like to pay an additional \$40-\$50 to get into the city and lunch with their editors a day early.

A conference line-up that will be fun and invigorating and relaxing—and send you home feeling more energized than you've felt in years. (Okay, that's a big promise to fill, but trust me. You're going to love what I'm not telling you about yet.)

The conference will take place at the **Adam's Mark Hotel** at City Avenue and Monument Road, Philadelphia, PA 19131, phone: (215) 581-5000. Hotel rates are: \$132/single occupancy; \$137/double; \$142/triple; \$147/quad—terrific rates, if you ask me (which you will...;->)

Conference costs are the same as this past year: **\$250 for early registration prior to July 1** and \$275 after July 1. A registration form will appear on the website as soon as humanly possible, so get your credit cards ready for **Liberty, Equity, & Futurity in Philly**. It will all add up to the kind of professional growth you won't want to do without.

Trust me.

For up-to-the-minute information watch the website at www.ninc.com or contact: Conference Coordinator Terey daly Ramin <terey@ismi.net> or Conference Planner Kate Dooley <ninc2001conf@yahoo.com>



Laura Resnick is

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Selling Elsewhere Is the Best Revenge”

One of my all-time favorite novels, W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*, was once rejected by an editor who remarked, “I think it is distasteful.” The novel not only became one of Maugham's most successful books (and, in my opinion, far and away his very best), it was also made into a fine movie with Tyrone Power. A couple of decades later, another editor wrote, “You're welcome to [John] Le Carré—he hasn't got any future,” after reading *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*. The book became the first of the author's international bestsellers, and (like a number of his works) was also adapted as a major motion picture. Tony Hillerman, who is now as culturally admired as he is commercially successful for his series of mysteries set on a Navajo reservation, received this rejection some thirty years ago: “If you insist on rewriting this, get rid of all that Indian stuff.”

Indeed, if you read *Rotten Rejections*, published by Pushcart Press, you'll find a huge variety of reasons which editors have given over the decades for rejecting works which went on to become classics forced on me in school, huge commercial bestsellers, and award-winning standard-bearers. Writers who now live as literary icons in our minds, and whose careers represent extraordinary commercial pinnacles, have often received rejections which would send a weak-kneed aspiring writer to bed with a bromide for a week.

As a not-infrequently rejected writer myself, I find that so comforting that I was genuinely astonished, years ago, to see a letter in the *Romance Writers Report* from someone who thought *Rotten Rejections* was in bad taste because it called into question the judgment of editors.

Hull-o-o-o! Anyone home? Exactly!

For goodness sake, if writers *didn't* call editors' judgment into question, then we'd give up completely on a book the moment even one editor said, “It's no good.” And what a criminal waste that would be! As Ninc members know (and as I assume editors know, too), editors often say that sort of thing about work which then sells elsewhere—even about work that goes on to achieve considerable success. Editorial judgment is subjective, and editors are only human.

Agents are only human, too. My favorite personal tale of rejection is one which I've recounted before in *NINK*: The first eleven agents I ever queried as an aspiring writer, back in 1987, all rejected me. Half of them told me there were no opportunities in romance, I should forget about it. The other half told me my work was unsaleable. I then sold both books

to the first publisher I queried on my own. (Several years later, as a steadily earning multi-published novelist, I decided it was time to hire an agent; and, no, I didn't query any of that first batch again.)

Those eleven agents were certainly not the last people to reject my work; nor was that initial experience the last time I was glad I didn't rely on someone else's negative opinion. On two separate occasions, eventual sale of a much-rejected novel has brought me a higher-than-ever-before advance. I've also sold at least two oft-rejected short stories for much more money than I'd have earned for them at any of the many places where they were rejected. And speaking of short stories, one of my more lucrative short story sales used an idea which I had never been able to sell as a novel, no matter how many times I revised the proposal.

No, I haven't sold all of my rejected work. Some of it did indeed prove to be unsaleable. But had I listened to everyone who ever told me a novel or story was unpublishable, I'd never have sold my first two books, and I'd never have made the sales described in the previous paragraph. Every single time I get a rejection, I think of that. I also think of Le Carré, Hillerman, Maugham, and the rest of the gang. In fact, few things inspire more professional courage in me than hearing about triumph in the face of adversity; e.g., a sale after many rejections.

Sharing Tales

Consequently, I asked a number of Ninc members to share similar tales in the hopes of adding to my store of positive examples and perhaps contributing to yours, too.

An agent told Lorraine Heath that her writing “lacks a vivid touch” and refused to represent her. *Sweet Lullaby*, the book that inspired this evaluation, sold three months later, made the Waldenbooks romance bestseller list when it was published and became a RITA finalist. Jodie Nida's first novel was rejected “by everyone on the face of the earth,” so she put it aside and broke into the business with other manuscripts. Ten years later, however, she revised that much-rejected first novel and sold it to Berkley as *Render Safe* (w/a Jackie Nida).

Being rejected by every editor in the free world is not that uncommon in the hidden past of many published novels. Two Denise Dietz novels, *Throw Darts at a Cheesecake* and *Beat Up a Cookie*, “had a dozen rejections” before Walker bought them in hardcover and Harlequin ▶ ▶ ▶



THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Worldwide bought the paperback reprint rights. Robyn Carr's *The House on Olive Street* (which is about a group of popular-fiction writers) picked up thirteen rejections before being acquired by Mira, where she has sold three books since then.

Jennifer Crusie's *Tell Me Lies* "was turned down a lot" before it sold to St. Martin's Press and went on to become a bestseller. In a particularly tidy twist of circumstances, one Ninc member wound up selling an oft-rejected manuscript to the exact same category romance line which had been the first to reject it several years earlier!

As career novelists, we're all familiar with a fact of life that non-writers find incredible: Writers' *own* publishers often reject their publishable work. "And as Susan Wiggs once said," a Ninc member recently told me, "A rejection is an invitation to submit elsewhere." Exactly! Even if your publisher discourages that. Unless your publisher offers to put you on salary with benefits, what right could they possibly have to ask you, an independent freelancer whom they'll drop like a venomous serpent if your sales figures decline, to simply give up on work that they won't buy? It's not personal, it's business. If your publisher won't publish a book, take it elsewhere and see what happens. It could be well worth the effort.

Jennifer Crusie gives an example of a book, *The Cinderella Deal*, which Bantam bought after her own then-publisher, Harlequin, rejected it; it went on to get a RITA nomination. Former Ninc Board member Candace Schuler explains that someone who was (very briefly) an editor at Harlequin Temptation turned down one of her books flat, with no room for discussion or revisions. Candace had done ten books with Temptation by then and felt confident the book could work, but the editor was adamant. A few weeks later, Candace sold the book to Silhouette Desire, where she made more money for it, in the long run, than she'd have made had it been released as a Temptation. The book also rose higher on the Waldenbooks romance bestseller list than any of her previous novels. "Incidentally," Candace adds, "[that editor] is no longer at Temptation. But I am."

When Sherry-Anne Jacobs' Australian publisher changed management, they sent back a book which the previous editorial director had told her they were going to buy; they also told her not to submit to them again. The book not only went on to sell in the UK and the USA, but it has been reprinted several times (meanwhile, the Australian publisher is under new management yet again).

Far more disruptive to one's schedule and income, of course, are editors who reject contracted novels after they're completed and turned in. Numerous writers have told stories over the years about this happening after they were

"orphaned" when the acquiring editor left the publisher, but sometimes the acquiring editor is the one who deems the delivered manuscript to be unpublishable. This is where the writer must find a whole new level of emotional endurance and self-confidence (not to mention thrifty financial habits) if she is to triumph.

A very successful genre author changed houses at one point, one of her reasons being that her new editor was enthusiastic about her doing a different kind of book that had an edgy, challenging theme. The proposal "was accepted swiftly and without question." The author delivered the book...and the editor declared it unpublishable. "Ultimately, I did five major rewrites for that house—and went without income for a solid year," the author says, but her efforts wrought no change in the publisher's steadfast rejection. However, once the book was finally free of that contract, two other publishers immediately made offers. The book went for a six-figure advance, had the author's largest print-run up to then, and did very well in the marketplace.

Unpublishable? Go figure.

Fantasy novelist Jennifer Roberson shares a similar tale. Her agent submitted an outline and chapters for a "meaty, mainstream novel of history, romance, and politics" set in 17th-Century Scotland. Instead of the one-book deal the agent proposed, Bantam was impressed enough to offer a three-book, six-figure deal.

However, after Roberson turned in the book, the editor told the agent that the first three hundred pages, fully one third of the manuscript, were "crap" and had to be cut. "I was stunned," Roberson says. "I'd given them what the outline promised, and what my agent had discussed with them in view of building a mainstream historical career with Bantam." Aware that the author is not always the best judge of her own work, she asked her agent to read the book. He agreed with her that the first three hundred pages of the book were not "crap," and that to completely cut them would destroy the story.

Bantam, however, remained firmly convinced that the book was unacceptable without the major cut they wanted, and so Roberson and her agent cancelled the contract. Very soon thereafter, Kensington made a two-book offer, with an on-signing advance that enabled Roberson to pay back the original advance to Bantam. Requested revisions were minimal, and the book (*Lady of the Glen*) has performed well in hardcover, trade paperback, and mass-market paperback.

"What I learned from this experience," Roberson says, "is that money is no substitute for trusting one's heart and the luxury of living without even a trace of regret for What Might Have Been. Authors must be true to themselves—and to their vision."

True To Your Vision

Sometimes, however, being true to one's vision has very peculiar results. A writer I know used a pseudonym to write a novel set in the 1960s with a black male protagonist. One of the publishers to whom it was submitted offered a six-

figure advance...but only if the author was available for tour.

During this discussion, the author's agent realized that the publisher assumed that the author was a black male writer in his mid-fifties who had lived through the events described in the novel. After discussing this with the author, the agent called back and told the publisher the truth: "The author can tour, but she's a white woman in her thirties." The publisher told the agent they didn't want the book after all and withdrew their offer.

The author adds, "We did manage to sell the book under a pen name to a mystery house for a lower-than-hoped-for five-figure advance. No touring."

However, as peculiar as that tale may seem, here's an even stranger one. A Ninc member got a rejection letter from a Ballantine editor which said, "Something about the manuscript made me sneeze. That might have been one of my problems [with it]." The novel went on to become the launch book for another house's romance program, was reprinted several times, sold in nine countries, and has earned out at six figures for that author.

Finally, for someone out there in the middle of what

seems like a very long slump of perpetual rejections with no hope in sight, please consider the experience of a Ninc member whose career bottomed out after a couple of books due to a variety of circumstances which included her editor being replaced by someone who didn't like her writing, her then-agent (later sued by many former clients) wasting a great deal of her time, and a major market slump in the author's sub-genre. Then, after eight years without a sale, this writer clicked with an agent she met at a Ninc conference. The following year, he got her under contract with two major publishing houses, one of which had previously rejected one of the books he now sold them. The author has been continually under contract ever since.

So pick yourself up, dust your manuscript off, and keep on trying. Who knows what could happen?

The Comely Curmudgeon would like to thank all the authors who contributed to this month's column. She apologizes to the writers whose contributions were not used because they did not meet her needs at this time, and she wishes those authors the best of luck in placing their anecdotes elsewhere.

MEMBER NEWS.....Compiled by Kathy Chwedyk

Good News For Persistent Author

Mary Blayney has signed a contract with Kensington for two traditional Regencies, her third and fourth books. The call from editor Amy Garvey came on the exact date of her first sale (September 27), but that first sale was twelve years ago. It's been a long time between books two and three, and Mary now understands why Winston Churchill insisted that you "Never, never, never give up!"

Reno Nominated for Pushcart Prize

Dawn Reno has been nominated for a second time for a Pushcart Prize. This nomination is for a short story called "Seeing Through the Mists" (*Futures Magazine*, April, 2000). The Pushcart is the premiere award for work originally published in small/literary magazines.

In addition to the Pushcart nomination, Reno has received word that she's a finalist in three categories for the EPPIE awards. The EPPIES

are annual awards given to the best in electronic publishing. *A Tale from Lavallah* (BooksOnScreen) has been named a finalist in the Children's Books category, *After Always* (Avid Press) is a finalist in the Young Adult category, and *Foxglove* (Bookmice) is a finalist in the Thriller category.

Jacobs Shortlisted for Australian Award

Sherry-Anne Jacobs' historical saga, *Like No Other*, written as Anna Jacobs, has been shortlisted for the Romantic Book of the Year. RBOTY is the major award for published authors by the Romance Writers of Australia.

The book is set in mid 18th-Century northern England—she calls it her *Wuthering Heights* book, but it has a happy ending.

Anna Jacobs' current books are *Seasons Of Love* (December, 2000); *Our Polly* (February, 2001; hardback); and *Lancashire Lass* (February, 2001; paperback). She also is the author of

A Proper Match, A Regency romance, as Sherry-Anne Jacobs.

Ferguson Signed for Regency Reference Book

Jo Ann Ferguson has received an offer from iPublish/Warner for her first nonfiction book, a Regency reference book aimed at Regency writers and readers. Her current novels are *My Lord Viking* (January, 2001; ImaJinn Books) and *Faithfully Yours* (February, 2001; Kensington Precious Gems Historical).

Gravity Recognized by Stephen King

Tess Gerritsen's suspense novel, *Gravity*, was named in Stephen King's popular nonfiction book, *On Writing*, as being on his list of the best books he's read in the last several years—and she didn't know it until someone sent her a congratulatory e-mail.

"My first reaction," said Gerritsen, "was: 'Huh? Are you sure?' That's when I ▶▶▶

MEMBER NEWS.....

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ glanced in the back of *On Writing*. Yep, there it was.

"The funny thing is, I had already bought a copy of *On Writing*, but my husband was reading it first, so I hadn't even been able to get my hands on it. It was right there on his nightstand."

Gerritsen admits to being astonished. She thought surely there had been a mistake.

"I mean, look at the other authors on his list! Larry McMurtry. Joyce Carol Oates. Kurt Vonnegut. I knew that King had enjoyed *Gravity*, because he sent my editor a marvelous quote for it. But King reads so many, many books in the course of a year, and *Gravity* was just one of them."

Asked if she thinks King's endorsement will mean great things for her career, Gerritsen said, "I don't know whether many people have noticed it. I'm not really expecting it to affect my sales figures for *Gravity*, but it would be nice. What matters most to me, and thrills me no end, is that the man I consider one of the greatest storytellers of our time has praised my work. I couldn't ask for any better compliment."

Gravity was published by Pocket Books in hardcover in 1999. The paperback edition was published in October, 2000.

Delphi Nominated for Favorite Print Publisher

Fran Baker's small press, Delphi Books, has been nominated for an Engravers Award via *Inscriptions E-Zine* for "Favorite Print Publisher."

Author Celebrates Milestone

Loree Lough's latest book, *Suddenly Home*—number five and the last in the *Suddenly* series from Steeple Hill's Love Inspired—will soon hit the shelves. She's about to turn in number two of her Turning Points series, entitled *Turn from the Past*. This is a milestone for Lough because this August she'll be able to say that she's secured fifty book contracts in a seven-year period, and 32 of these books have won one type of award or another.

"Ouch," she joked. "I hurt my arm just now, patting myself on the back! I'm even more proud of this news—recently, I proposed a book project to Baltimore, a literary press, and it looks as though it'll be quite a production. The editor has appointed me 'point man,' which means I not only write the 'bible' for the novel and secure authors to write individual chapters, I'll have to pre-edit the thing!"

The best part, she said, is that proceeds of the book will be donated to the Johns Hopkins Children's

Center. So far, she's received enthusiastic acceptances from most of the multi-published authors she's tapped for the project.

Thompson and West Nominated for Edgars

Nine members Victoria Thompson and Chassie West have both been nominated for Edgar Awards.

Victoria Thompson's nomination is in the Best Paperback Original category for *Murder on St. Mark's Place*, which was published by Berkley in March, 2000. Her next book, *Murder on Gramercy Park*, will be out in March, 2001.

Chassie West has been nominated in the Best Paperback Original category for *Killing Kin*, which was published by Avon in July, 2000. West's next book, *Killer Riches*, will be released in April, 2001.

The Edgar, or Edgar Allen Poe Award, is given by the Mystery Writers of America and is the oldest and most prestigious of mystery awards. The awards ceremony will take place on May 3 in New York City.

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

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