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

Naked on the Shelves: BookScan

BY EILEEN WILKS

Did your last book sell well? How about the one that hit the shelves last month? Only your publisher knows for sure, though you and your agent may be able to take a flying guess when your first royalty statement shows up. Bestseller lists give some idea of who and what is hot, but hard sales figures have always been a closely guarded secret, unavailable to anyone without the secret handshake.

Until now. Until BookScan. A unit of the Netherlands media company VNU Retail Entertainment Group, BookScan proposes to provide the publishing industry with comprehensive point-of-sale data from the major retailers, and soon from independent bookstores as well. BookScan has exclusive agreements with Barnes and Noble, Barnesandnoble.com, Borders, Costco Wholesale, Hastings Entertainment, Ingram Book Company, Musicland, and Target. They are negotiating with the American Booksellers Association to provide data from its 3,000 independent bookseller members.

Oren Teicher, CEO of the ABA, said they are eager to participate, in

part for the money, but also because it will strengthen the organization's own bestseller lists. The chief hurdle still to be crossed is a technical one—participating stores use roughly half a dozen systems for tracking sales and inventory—but BookScan

**Hitting the lists
may be the only way
of knowing your
book is selling well,
but it says nothing
about a book's
long-term earnout.**

is confident they can solve the translation problem.

VNU has the experience to back up their claims. VideoScan, one of VNU's subsidiaries, is held to have transformed the home video industry. And VNU's best-known offspring, SoundScan, which generates the charts published in *Billboard* maga-

zine, is widely held to have revolutionized the music industry—to mingled cheers and jeers. James Atlas, head of the "Penguin Lives" biography series, believes that "SoundScan helped open up the music business" to the success achieved by independent labels.

Geoff Shandler, executive editor of Little, Brown Company, a division of AOL Time Warner, agreed in his article in the *Industry Standard* about the transformative quality of SoundScan, but he didn't see it as a positive change. "Whole genres of music previously ignored were suddenly perceived as wildly commercial," he wrote. "Those records had been selling all along, just not charting. Once listed, though, multiplier effects (record stores often automatically discount or give preferential display to albums on the charts) kicked in and they did even better." The result, says Shandler, is that "just about everything became Britney, Faith, Puffy—in short, junk."

Shandler isn't the only one in publishing circles breaking out in a sweat over the advent of BookScan. The *Dallas Morning News* warned:

Cont. on p. 4 ▶ ▶ ▶

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

One hot summer afternoon in 1999, Georgia Bockoven phoned me and asked if I would serve as Ninc's president-elect. I understood what she was really asking: Would I serve a year as president-elect and a year as president. This would be no short-term commitment.

I hesitated. I had a hectic writing schedule, two teenage sons, two beloved parents who, it turned out, were embarking on what has proven to be a ghastly run of bad luck regarding their health, and a husband who for some reason likes to spend time with me. Saying yes to Georgia would mean devoting two whole years to Ninc board work, possibly at the expense of my career and my loved ones.

"Oh, come on, Barbara," Georgia cajoled. "It'll be fun!"

Now my two-year stint is almost finished, and yes, it's been fun. Busy, challenging, sometimes frustrating, often rewarding—and fun.

I'm proud of what Ninc has accomplished this year. Our organization has lent its voice and muscle to a number of issues that affect published authors. We've worked to strengthen copyright protections. We've researched the legal aspects of used book sales and the feasibility of limiting such sales. We've fought for the right of authors to control their pseudonyms. We've collaborated with other writers' groups on drafting an Author's Bill of Rights, a project begun under my predecessor, Carla Neggers. (Ratification was delayed by the events of 9/11, but we hope to have a ratified document soon.) We've participated in our very first amicus curiae brief. We've strengthened our relationship with the Authors Guild and opened lines of communication with the Association of American Publishers. Some of our battles have ended in weary truces. But we've reached some worthwhile goals, and we've positioned Ninc to continue its advocacy work in the future.

We've also gained new members. A committee (Advisory Council representative Georgia Bockoven, president-elect Pat Rice, and membership chair Kathy Lynn Emerson) updated our application process. In addition, Kathy and Pat designed a brochure for distribution to prospective members.

I'd like to say that these achievements make me optimistic about Ninc's future. But I'm worried.

Novelists, Inc. cannot survive without the active involvement of its members. My greatest fear for Ninc's future is that not enough members are willing to give something back to the organization that gives so much to them.

We lost money on our conference this year. Our program expenditures for the conference were extremely modest (which is amazing, given the extraordinary quality of our speakers) but unfortunately, not enough people chose to attend, and hotel penalties kicked in. I know those of you who didn't come to the conference had valid reasons. You were facing deadlines, you'd spent your travel budget on other conferences, the timing was inconvenient, you had family responsibilities. But the problem with low conference attendance is an ongoing one, and it mystifies me, since Ninc's conference is, by far, one of the best there is (as I'm sure you've gathered if you've been reading the conference reports in *NINK*).

Beyond the conference, Ninc also has a problem finding volunteers to perform the tasks necessary to keep this organization functioning smoothly. Please think about what you might be able to contribute to Ninc. If a board member or committee chair calls and asks you to volunteer, don't

automatically say no. Your other obligations are undoubtedly great, but with rare exception, they're no greater than the obligations of those members who have said yes.

Remember: it'll be fun!

It has been an honor and a privilege—and a great deal of fun—serving you this year. You've got a fabulous board in place for next year. All they need to accomplish even more is *you*—your support, your ideas, your energy, and your commitment.

— **Barbara Keiler**

KICK INTERNET PIRACY

Novelists, Inc. has notified members, in *NINK's* Breaking News column as well as on the Ninclink, of science-fiction writer Harlan Ellison's lawsuit to combat copyright infringement on the Internet.

The suit's full name is Harlan Ellison v. Stephen Robertson, America Online, Inc., RemarQ Communities, Inc., Critical Path, Inc., Citizen 513, and Does 1-10, and it has been filed in the Federal District Court, Central District of California in Los Angeles (Civil Case No. 00-04321 FMC9RCx). All the plaintiffs have, in varying ways, actively endorsed or participated in Internet piracy—reproducing Ellison's copyrighted material online without permission or payment to Ellison.

This legal fight will be protracted and difficult. On Ellison's behalf, Science Fiction Writers of America is soliciting contributions to Ellison's legal fund to help him fight Internet piracy, a practice that threatens all authors.

If you are interested in contributing to Ellison's legal fund, you may send a check, payable to Law Office of M. Christine Valada, to Kick Internet Piracy, P.O. Box 55935, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413.

LETTERS TO NINK



Clarification & Shameless Plug

It's come to my attention that a comment in my closing conference column may have appeared to be a slam at the Author's Guild. It was not. It was strictly a (very slanted <g>) comment on why Ninc members might want to retain their Ninc membership, a comment about what Ninc does and does well.

No slight to the Guild was intended as it's my belief that the AG performs way above and beyond for all authors, whether those authors belong to the AG or not. I am extremely grateful to the AG's Kay Murray who appeared on two Ninc conference panels despite a low conference turnout and her own busy schedule. That's an example of above and beyond.

During the conference, Kay illustrated beyond question why membership in both organizations is of benefit to Ninc members: As a union the AG simply performs services for authors that Ninc cannot possibly tackle. Its size and clout throughout our industry are phenomenal. Without it, authors, writers, would not have most—if any—of the rights we now have (and usually enjoy <g>).

And yes, since my column made a shameless plug for Ninc, this is now a shameless plug for the Author's Guild. <g>

**Cheerfully,
Terey daly Ramin**

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

Brenda Jernigan, Lillington, NC

New Members

Ann Schuessler (*Ann Roth*), Seattle, WA
Jen Holling, San Antonio, TX
Dennis Foley, Whitefish, MT

**Ninc has room to grow...recommend
membership to your colleagues.**

**Prospective members
may apply online at www.ninc.com.**

New Year's Resolution:

**Renew your own membership now...
and strengthen the power of writers
by growing Ninc among all novelists.
(Ninc makes a difference...see Philly Redux
report on AG/iPublish Face-to-Face.)**

BOOKSCAN

▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 1

"You think it's bad now? The charts don't even track huge genres such as romance and sci-fi. [Inaccurate, but never mind that for now.] Imagine a world where third-rate versions of Anne Rice shove everyone else off the lists." Jennifer Rudolph Walsh, co-head of the New York literary department at the William Morris agency, called BookScan satanic, saying it "... could actually be the death of some kinds of literary darlings."

Of course, those of us writing popular fiction may see this as a good thing—once we stop grinding our teeth over some of the various pejoratives that have been flung at our genres-of-choice by those worried about the fate of more literary fare. SoundScan is credited with having promoted the phenomenal growth of country music over the last few years. Can BookScan do the same for genre fiction?

The answer seems to be an uncertain maybe. Eileen Fallon of the Fallon Literary Agency omitted the hyperbole in describing her concerns about BookScan, but she did call it a double-edged sword. "While we might hope that publishers could use this new information to increase sales of books already out there," she said, "the more likely scenario is that they'll use it to narrow the range of books on their lists."

Network television now gives a new series a scant three weeks to catch a substantial market share—a tactic that would have canceled such favorites as *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *Star Trek* before they were halfway into their first season. Booksellers are already pulling books from the shelves far faster than they used to; anything that accelerates this trend isn't going to be welcomed by authors.

"Any book that isn't likely to make a quick break from the gate," Fallon says, "will be even less likely to

be published in the first place. Yet we all know that many, many extremely successful books build in a more gradual way."

She cited a nonfiction book from the '80s—*The Dance of Anger* by Harriet Lerner—and Anita Diamant's novel, *The Red Tent*, as examples of books that stayed in print for years before hitting any bestseller lists. Once BookScan has corralled a sufficiently large portion of the nation's point-of-sale data—SoundScan's bestseller lists, for example, are derived from sales at 86 percent of the nation's music

The more modest version of BookScan currently costs a large publishing house about \$75,000 a year.

stores—the company plans to license bestseller lists to newspapers and magazines.

Bestseller lists have long been regarded with obsession and distrust. Hitting the lists may be the only way of knowing your book is selling well, but it says nothing about a book's long-term earnout. The lure of numbers can be deceptive. BookScan promises to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth—but only about one aspect of a book: its immediate sales.

Heaven knows editors have always paid attention to an author's track record, but they've also been aware that any number of factors outside the author's control can affect a book's sales. But once a publishing house starts paying several hundred thousand dollars a year for numbers, they acquire a mesmeric significance.

Several hundred thousand a year? That's the fee the industry's major players will have to cough up to subscribe to the newest version of the service. The more modest version of BookScan currently costs a large publishing house about \$75,000 a year. For this, they can access the BookScan website to see how well their books are selling at Barnes and Noble.

What, exactly, is BookScan selling for these annual fees? Over 800 bestseller lists broken down by subject, format (mass market, hardcover, trade paper), region and metropolitan area, according to about.com. These reports will be available to subscribers on a proprietary website, and BookScan will also provide publishers with marketing reports updated weekly on sales by subject, price point, demographics, and market share. Individual title reports provide sales by eight major regions, author, and 99 metropolitan areas.

Will sales of Hillary Clinton's memoirs justify the \$8 million advance Simon and Schuster paid? Can Harlequin make chick lit work in the Midwest with its new Red Dress Ink line? Has the current literary fad, whatever it might be, peaked? And just how well did your last book sell? BookScan offers answers. For a fee. To anyone who pays that fee.

Some industry analysts remain cheerfully immune to the gloom. Eliza Truitt at *Slate* posed the question: "Will the arrival of this new system really allow literary hothouse flowers to strangle under the kudzu of diet books and romance novels?" (Ah, yes, those casually-slung pejoratives...) Her answer was that it wasn't likely. She pointed out that "...a pretty close approximation of the BookScan list has existed for several years, and it's barely changed the publishing landscape," referring to the *USA Today* Bestsellers List.


Michael Cader of *Publishers Lunch* feels there's no reason to worry that Bookscan's bestseller lists, once available, will pre-empt existing lists. "The

implicit assumptions and accompanying oversights are many," Cader writes. He points out that no one ever said *The New York Times* is abandoning its current system for BookScan; the newspaper's lists already have ample competition that's based more on straight numbers. He also stated that additional bestseller lists, such as those from BookSense, will continue to offer results based on sales positions at stores rather than aggregated sales and that B&N moved to their own list a while ago anyway.

And, indeed, there are potential benefits. As David Kirkpatrick pointed out in *The New York Times*, BookScan should "help publishers sharpen marketing tactics and sales forecasts, just as its cousin SoundScan did in the music industry." As a result, the numbers of unsold books returned from stores could decrease. Lower returns can't help but benefit everyone in the industry, from booksellers to distributors to publishers—and yes, authors, too, in the long run.

Think about it. Houses have traditionally had to hold out substantial reserves against returns for the initial royalty periods because they had no way of knowing how the number of copies shipped compared to the number of copies sold. BookScan should take some of the guesswork out of computing reserves against returns. If your publisher knows how many copies of your book actually sold in 86 percent of the nation's bookstores during the first royalty period, the accounting elves ought to be able to adjust reserves pretty accurately.

But will they?

That's one question BookScan won't answer. 

USA Today-bestselling author Eileen Wilks, a two-time Rita finalist, has fourteen books in print and is the author of novellas in four anthologies. Her latest books include Jacob's Proposal (*Silhouette Desire* 10/01), Luke's Promise (*Silhouette Desire* 11/01), and Michael's Temptation (*Silhouette Desire* 12/01).

Bestseller Lists

Why do bestseller lists matter? Until the advent of BookScan, they offered the only glimpse into what was selling well—right now. They do not, however, indicate what books sell well over time. The *Bible* has never appeared on the NYT list, for example. The three most-heeded national bestseller lists are published by *USA Today*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *The New York Times*.

The New York Times

The *Times* list is based on the largest sampling of booksellers, with over 4,000 stores reporting plus a number of wholesalers. Titles are divided into hardcover and paperback lists, then further separated into fiction, nonfiction, business, and a category called "Advice, How-To, and Miscellaneous." A children's category was added last year when the Harry Potter books spent so many weeks occupying the top fiction spots. Humor is included in nonfiction; business books inhabit their own category. Not every book published and sold is represented. The *Times* asks participating booksellers for sales information on a list of titles sent to those stores, a list they say is based on input from booksellers, although publishers frequently call with tips about which books are selling well.

USA Today

While the *USA Today* list is drawn from a slightly smaller sampling (about 3,000 bookstores, including some online booksellers), it represents actual sales that are not divided by type or based on a predetermined list of which titles should be counted. Paperbacks are pitted against hardcovers; literary novels against Tom Clancy's latest. The list ranks the top 50 sellers (on the Internet, the top 150) in the country every week.

This democratic mingling of genres and formats can give a different perspective on what's hot. For example, at the start of September, the fifth book on the *Times* hardcover nonfiction list, *Ghost Soldiers* by Hampton Sides, wasn't even on *USA Today's* Top 50 list. That week the *Times* paperback fiction list put Tom Clancy's *The Bear and the Dragon* in the #2 spot, while it was #18 on *USA Today's* all-inclusive list, and Nora Roberts's *Time and Again* held first place on both. Older literary works such as *Catcher in the Rye* frequently hit the list, probably because they are often included in school syllabi.

Publishers Weekly

The nine lists compiled by *Publishers Weekly* from 3,000 independent and chain bookstores, augmented by a statistical sampling, are structured with industry professionals in mind: booksellers, literary agents, libraries, and publishing houses both domestic and international. Fiction and nonfiction are segregated on the hardcover lists but mingle freely in the mass market and trade paperback lists. Other categories include religion, children's books, computer, and audio books.



Liberty, Equity, Futurity Philly Redux

The Bridget Jones Phenomenon

Harlequin/Silhouette was out in force to explain their new Red Dress Ink line at this discussion moderated by Pamela Browning. Panel participants included Margaret Marbury of Harlequin/Silhouette, editor of the Red Dress Ink imprint; Ann LaFarge of Kensington; Melissa Jeglinski of Harlequin/Silhouette; and literary agent Damaris Rowland.

Red Dress Ink, Marbury said, is aimed at young, urban, single women, primarily in their 20s and 30s. These chick-lit books are admittedly inspired by the success of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* and other similar books about the lifestyles of young single women. They are not romance and do not require traditional romantic happy endings; rather, they are popular, commercial fiction about independent women finding themselves, broadening their realms, books that while they are about women are not political statements for feminism.

Marbury noted that Harlequin/Silhouette's new imprint came about to reflect the reality of single women, ages eighteen to thirty-four, in order to fill a need for books that speak in these women's voices. They are irreverent, lighthearted, upbeat revelations about career and dating pressures city dwellers experience; Red Dress Ink books are fun, flirty, never depressing. The tones differ, but the books tell life as it is. The writing is witty and readily accessible—women's fiction in language that young people as well as older ones can relate to.

A Red Dress Ink story must be compelling. Though voice is important, there must be enough story to carry the book. Diary or journal format carries the risk of becoming bor-

ing. Chick lit, which began in the early '90s in England, has been on the drawing boards at Harlequin/Silhouette since 1998. RDI was made a separate imprint because it is not romance, and the marketing thrust will be toward non-romance readers.

Marbury sees the RDI writer as any age, from any geographical location. The protagonists may be country girls experiencing the city or city girls transplanted to the country—small town mentality in the city or vice versa—but they are all exploring their value systems. Books may be first or third person, with single or multiple points of view. The important factors are that these books are “fun,” and that the protagonists are interesting as people. Generally chick lit has a happy ending, but that ending doesn't necessarily involve a man.

Red Dress Ink books are trade-size with covers that bear little resemblance to romance. The first of these books were published in November 2001. Any of the editors at Harlequin and Silhouette can provide writers with more information about what they're seeking if you contact them directly.

Romance readers, LaFarge noted, may be put off by the lack of the traditional happy ending in chick lit. Jeglinski added that the line appeals to young women but also to various generations. Rowland mentioned that the line seems very generational and wondered whether an author from the previous romance era could write in this new genre, which expresses current values.

Editors from other houses agreed that they, too, are seeking new voices in women's fiction. Some of the phrases they used to describe what they want include, “high energy,

sharper, more contemporary tone,” “tell-it-like-it-is style regarding male/female relationships,” “compelling stories with fresh, original voices,” “well-developed characters, great stories, something different,” “new, more contemporary attitude or state of mind.”

It was agreed that in chick-lit books, relationships with friends are also crucial. Both *Bridget Jones's Diary* and HBO's *Sex in the City* were cited frequently as reference points.

**Reported by Linda Barlow
and Ann Josephson**

Nite Owl Session: New Trends in Romance & Women's Fiction

Nite Owl sessions are lively, candid discussions for Nine members without publishing professionals present. This session proved a wide-ranging discussion of such genres as chick lit, paranormals, historicals, erotica, multicultural romances, fantasy, and suspense. Are Bridget Jones clones the next big thing? Opinions differed, but Harlequin is pushing its Red Dress line of contemporary women's fiction, chick-lit style. There seems to be a general sense that chick-lit novels appeal to a different sensibility, and perhaps a different audience, than traditional, happy-ending romances.

Fantasy romance and paranormals seem to be popular, but the group speculated that in most cases they appeal to a sub-segment of the entire romance market. The amount of crossover to science fiction/fantasy readers is unclear. Someone suggested that the current popularity of vampire, werewolf, and other dangerous heroes might be a new incarnation—for a

younger generation—of the old, currently un-PC alpha male hero.

Writers of multicultural romance expressed concern over the vagaries of bookstore categorization: it seems their books are frequently shelved somewhere other than in the romance section. We also discussed the way male-authored relationship books tend to get big mainstream treatment for no other reason, it seems, than that they are written by men.

Reported by Linda Barlow

Writing and Selling the Cross-Genre Book

Editors and agents including Cecelia Oh, Ann LaFarge, Sarah Gallick, and Damaris Rowland discussed the issues that confront authors who write and editors who publish cross-genre novels. Some members of the panel believe that there's a little more hope for the cross-genre book now than in the past; such books are no longer regarded as the kiss of death to an author's career. However, cross-genre books tend to be difficult to write because the expectations of two or more audiences must be met. The panel agreed that publisher support is vital. It's critical to position and market the book correctly. Publishers must be committed to such books and willing to let them find their audience.

All the editors insist that they are always looking for something new, something original, something fresh and exciting that has the potential to create a new genre (Tom Clancy, John Grisham, and Anne Rice were cited as examples of authors who have done this in the past).

We also discussed location of books in bookstores and whether Women's Fiction as a category is viable or too broad. **LB**

Writing the Book of the Heart

Imagine a roundtable discussion with authors who all have a book inside them that is crying out to be written, even though it might not have enormous market potential. Such was

the session, "Writing The Book of the Heart." We discussed the risks and rewards of taking the time to pour our energy and creativity into a work that we might not be able to sell. One participant raised the point that the book of the heart isn't written for an audience, but for ourselves. Perhaps it doesn't need to be sold.

Several authors had already written books of the heart and successfully marketed them. Others were working on such novels, or hoping to begin soon. There was general agreement that it might be easier to take the risk of writing the book of the heart if one isn't the sole support for one's family, but has another source of income!

The general consensus seemed to be that writers need to spend some of our time writing what will fulfill us personally, instead of always being slaves to the expectations of editors, agents, reviewers, and fans. **LB**

History of Genre

This panel, moderated by Jeanne Savery Casstevens, focused mostly on the romance genre, its history over the past thirty years, and how it has changed and developed. Hilary Ross described pulling Rosemary Rogers's *Sweet Savage Love* out of the slush pile and recommending the book to her boss as a potential bestseller. As we all know, it worked, but Ross believed the novel set up some false expectations for the historical romance genre. Because the book had a lot of sado-masochistic erotic scenes, editors and authors seemed to think for a time that the "rape saga" was what historical romance readers wanted. Ross now thinks it was the explicit sex, not necessarily the kinky sex, to which readers responded so strongly. Before the early 1970s, sex in romance generally took place behind the bedroom door. Although the rape saga has died, sexy romances have continued to be a popular category ever since, and there's no evidence that that is changing.

On the sales and distribution level, the business model for bookselling has changed significantly in recent



BREAKING NEWS

BY OLIVIA RUPPRECHT

It's been a pretty lackluster month in the publishing world, with the biggest "headlines" meriting little more than a yawn. Case in point: The most attention-getting whoop-tee-do of late seems to revolve around an author with foot-in-mouth disease and the queen of daytime TV.

O! Puh-leeze....

Call it post-9/11 syndrome, but if I see one more article about Oprah kicking Jonathan Franzen off her show for some snotty remarks he made, I'm going to scream.

So, you lucked out and didn't read all about it? Here's the eye-rolling scoop: Mr. Franzen's *The Corrections*—billed as one of the most critically acclaimed and best-selling novels of the year and published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux—was selected as an Oprah Book Club pick. A televised dinner and interview were planned until the author, who doesn't own a television, implied that his work and those who read it were above Oprah's literary tastes.

Down came the hatchet from critics and Oprah fans alike; out came profuse apologies from Mr. Franzen after bearing the splats of many thrown tomatoes. His publisher maintained the incident only increased interest in the book, which has gone on to score a National Book Award; other publishers took some glee in the faux pas fiasco. As Bill Thomas, Doubleday's editor-in-chief, candidly said, "One would have to be a better person than me not to be amused by this whole drama." Few people were laughing, ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

▶▶▶▶ however, when despite all of his apologies, Mr. Franzen let it be known that he is not comfortable having an "Oprah Pick" logo printed on the front of his dust jacket. "I see this as my book, my creation," he told *The Oregonian*, "and I didn't want that logo of corporate ownership on it. It's not a sticker, it's part of the cover. They redo the whole cover. You can't take it off. I know it says Oprah's Book Club, but it's an implied endorsement, both for me and for her. The reason I got into this business is because I'm an independent writer, and I didn't want that corporate logo on my book."

Note to Jonathan Franzen: Duh!

Literary Award Seeking Nominees

Now here's something worthy of mention, particularly for authors of African-American descent. The first Hurston/Wright Legacy Award is seeking nominations from publishers in three award categories. First fiction, Fiction, and Nonfiction. Borders Books and the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation will be awarding \$10,000 for each first place winner and two finalists in each category will receive \$5,000. Interested? Here are the rules: Writers must be of African-American descent. Books must be submitted by their publishers with author permission granted. Titles must have been published between January, 2001, and December, 2001, in the U.S., or must be U.S. editions of foreign books published stateside for the first time. Submissions are to be postmarked by midnight of December 31, 2001, ▶▶▶



Philly Redux

▶▶▶ years with the disappearance of the small regional wholesalers and the broad adoption of sophisticated databases that track actual sales. It's no longer possible to force out huge print runs without evidence that the books will sell through. Since distributors "buy the net," an author's print runs can go down rather than up. On the other hand, sell-throughs are higher and returns are lower, which makes for a more efficient business.

According to the professionals on the panel, the eight-week sell-through number is the magic number publishers are looking at to determine a book's performance, and they want to see a sell-through of 65-80 percent.

How do you break out a book in such a numbers-oriented market? The panel agreed that it's difficult. The book must be terrific enough to get everyone in the house so excited that they will work together to promote and sell the book. **LB**

Special Presentation by Kay Murray of the Authors Guild

Kay Murray, publishing attorney and General Counsel for the Authors Guild, apprised Ninc members of some of what the Authors Guild has been working on recently, including the Guild's successful class-action suit against *The New York Times* over electronic rights and an important ruling against Random House regarding electronic rights of novels of Kurt Vonnegut, William Styron, and Robert Parker. She also reminded us of the excellent legal advice of which Authors Guild members can avail themselves should they have any legal problems with their contracts or their publishers. This group later joined

another ongoing session to discuss the used bookstore issue. **LB**

Questions and Answers with iPublish and the Authors Guild

[Editor's note: When e-publisher iPublish first set up shop, the Authors Guild went public with its strong objections to the boilerplate contract iPublish was offering. The Guild issued a release itemizing its concerns and sent e-mails to its members cautioning them against selling to iPublish. Novelists, Inc. was eager to provide a forum in which Claire Zion of iPublish and Kay Murray of the Authors Guild could meet face-to-face to discuss the contract at our conference, and Zion and Murray expressed their gratitude for the opportunity.]

Kay Murray of the Authors Guild and Claire Zion of iPublish were present at this session moderated by Barbara Keiler. They went head to head on various issues that have been raised by the Authors Guild about the iPublish contract. Although Claire and Kay disagreed about many issues, they appeared to make a good start at what we hope will be an ongoing dialogue.

Kay pointed out that the contract iPublish authors must agree to is more unfavorable to authors than many other e-publishing contracts. For example, iPublish pays no advance (some e-publishers do pay a small advance, but many do not). iPublish royalties are 25 percent of net (40 percent is more common), and they pay only twice a year (some other e-publishers pay quarterly).

Claire revealed that the online contract that writers must agree to when submitting their work to iPublish is only for unpublished or unagented writers. Although this is not stated on their website, it turns out there's a different contract for experienced writers. Since all Ninc members are by definition published authors, none of us in Ninc should be pushing the online *submit* button on the iPublish website. Some, but not all, clauses in the standard contract are negotiable.

The bottom line—if you're inter-

ested in working with iPublish, call them personally to negotiate the contract or have your agent do so.

LB

Face-Time With Editors (Ask an Editor)

This panel, moderated by Pat McLaughlin, proved to be a free-flowing session with a number of editors from various houses available to answer questions. Among the editors were Ann LaFarge, Cecilia Oh, Christine Zika, Margaret Marbury, Birgit Davis-Todd, Melissa Jeglinski, and Mary Teresa Hussey. Several editors repeated, as they had said throughout the conference, that they are always looking for fresh, exciting, and innovative books.

Here are a few of the questions and answers: Is there a "kiss of death" for a novel? Not as long as the book is really terrific. Should I use e-mail to pitch my editor or discuss book ideas? Yes, at many houses e-mail is used frequently for this purpose. Do editors read the boards on the eHarlequin website to see what readers are saying about the books they publish? Yes, they do. They may also look at reviews on sites such as Amazon.com to see how readers are responding to their titles. If authors get mail directly from readers raving about their books, are the editors interested in seeing a copy? Yes, by all means, send them along.

What trends do editors see at the current time in publishing? Romantic suspense continues to do well. Contemporary romance is selling better, particularly when it hits upon what's hot in other media like TV and films. Romantic comedy continues to sell. The popularity of fantasy and paranormal stories seems to be building. And historical romances are hitting bestseller lists more frequently these days.

Note: these remarks on publishing trends were made three days prior to the September 11 tragedy. How publishing may continue to be affected by those events remains unclear.

LB

Getting Tough on Women's Fiction

The general mood of this workshop was upbeat with a positive outlook for the future of women's fiction. Panelists and contributors were: Sarah Gallick, Literary Guild; Damaris Rowland, the Damaris Rowland Agency; Carolyn Haines, author of *Shop Talk*; Christine Zika, Berkley; Ann LaFarge, Kensington; Jake Elwell, Weiser and Weiser Agency; and Hilary Ross and Cecilia Oh, Penguin Putnam. Moderator was Patricia Rice.

The most important heads-up to come out of the workshop was the discussion of NAL's new Accent line. Cecilia Oh explained that their editors were finding books they loved but that didn't fit an established mold. They wanted to publish the books but only if they could do it effectively. NAL has decided to pool the resources of these great books and create a presence for Women's Fiction in the marketplace through a special imprint—Accent. Each book will be a trade paperback sold as General Fiction. The Accent logo will be used to alert booksellers and readers that here is something special. The goal is to build an identity of quality for the line.

Okay, on to the other stuff. Carolyn Haines stated that she could write smart but she couldn't structure a book as a marketing tool. "The story dictates to me what it is." And the editors and agents on the panel agreed a writer should follow his instincts.

Zika said consumers are buying books by author name and feels that publishers are taking that approach and not pigeonholing to the market. LaFarge observed that publishers do want to give readers who have expectations what they need. However, she feels there are many more readers without expectations; the publisher wants to be open to them, too.

On the question of when a writer should break out of genre, the responses were uniform—when the numbers support such a movement. Rowland observed that the people who break out have been on an



BREAKING NEWS

▶▶▶▶ and applications can be found online at www.hurstonwright.org/legacyaward.html

Nominees will be announced in July, 2002. The awards ceremony will be held at the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, that following September.

Barnes and Noble Cuts the Cheese

Who Moved My Cheese? and other books such as *Tuesdays with Morrie* have been deleted from the Barnes and Noble bestseller list. Finally! While such phenomenal longevity of a title says volumes about the content, B&N has decided that after twelve months it's time to make room for newer offerings that can benefit from the exposure that such a list provides.

This is good news to those who were crowded out by old mainstays, since B&N is the largest bookstore chain in the country and the promotions and discounts that go along with making their list can make a huge difference in a book's success. Predictably, however, not everyone is pleased. Publishers and agents of extended bestsellers like *Body for Life* are crying "Not fair!" and want their places back.

Too bad, B&N has spoken and, barring a retraction or exceptions made, anyone who wants to gripe about it is going to have to deliver another book that can make the list. And stay on it—but for no longer than a year.

While we're on the subject, Michael Korda, switching hats from esteemed Simon and Schuster editor to esteemed author, has penned *Making the List: A Cultural History of the American Bestseller 1900-1999*. A Barnes

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BREAKING NEWS

▶▶▶ and Noble November release, it examines the history of bestsellers and the ingredients that go into them. It is Mr. Korda's observation that since the first list was published 107 years ago, there has been an amazing consistency in what the masses want to read.

He maintains that self-help books were as popular 100 years ago as they are today, citing *Letters of a Self-Made Merchant to his Son* as a hit in 1903. He asks, "What is the difference between that and *Who Moved My Cheese?* He also points out that a trend from early in the 20th century has re-emerged, with a handful of authors repeatedly dominating the fiction bestseller lists. In 1990 there wasn't a single newcomer; every author had previously appeared on a bestseller list. Which might have something to do with yet another maxim he proffers, that "The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer."

As interesting as his book sounds, *Making the List* may well spell heavier pockets for Mr. Korda himself.

October 23, 2001 B.C.

That's B.C., as in Barbara Cartland, and October 23 is the day her pink-fringed website began offering all of her work. That would be more than 720 books written in 78 years, translated into 36 languages and selling over one billion copies. Oh, and there's another 160 previously unpublished manuscripts (!) to be had for subscribers. While fervent fans can download 12 books a year for 100 pounds, a dozen might prove unsatisfactory for those who can read faster than she could turn them out.

▶▶▶



Philly Redux

▶▶▶ evolving track. "You build momentum in today's market, and when you reach certain levels then you can break out."

What is the break-out point? When the sales numbers justify the movement. Other factors that help are list presence, positive responses from booksellers, and having an editor willing to champion your work. Gallick admitted that quotes have an impact on her selection choices for her book club.

Haines warned that the use of a pen name on a break-out book can be a double-edged sword. "You can't take the audience with you if they don't know who you are." She followed with words of encouragement to the writer ready to move on to a larger book, "Don't ask permission. You can only get noticed with the writing."

Reported by Cathy Maxwell

Friday's Luncheon Speaker, Coach Susan E. Race: "Forging Your Future"

Coach Susan E. Race is the founder of Personal Growth Systems. Her book, *Succeeding in the Workplace*, is available through her website (coach@personalgrowthsystems.com), at online bookstores, or through special order in bookstores.

Coach Race's enthusiasm and energy came through with every word she spoke. Her stated purpose was to help us remember all we need in order to achieve all we can in our lives.

When referring to writer's block among other problems that slow one down, she suggested that the real problem was the clutter in our lives. Her solution involved admitting this, embracing it, welcoming the knowledge—and figuring out how to get it out of the way so one can return to a creative mode:

Race says to clear the clutter from our lives including the "shoulds" and the "musts." She prefers "choose" and "want" to those words. She told us to hold the belief that we have a gift we should share with others, that we should not focus on things that make us struggle.

Struggle blocks the flow. So, she says, feel terrific, value and honor intuitions and anything else that makes one look at things in a positive fashion. She believes one should rid oneself of the little daily "have tos," "shoulds," and "musts" that take focus from what is important to the writer. Whatever takes one outside oneself is good: tai chi, music, movies, volunteer work, etc.

She asks each of us, "What one thing do you want to change in the next six months? What do you need to change in your beliefs and environment, etc., to make that change?" When one is ready to make that change, to reach for the next level, it is all right to ask for help. She says to use the positive approach of iterating "I can be, can have, or can do, anything I want."

"We must have integrity, be who we are. Then we can address needs. Finally, we can achieve the 'wants' in our lives."

Reported by Jeanne Savery Casstevens

LITTLE MUSEUM OF HORRORS: The Mutter Museum of Philadelphia

For anyone even remotely interested in forensics, mystery, and things ghoulish and grotesque, the talk-and-slide program given by Gretchen Worden, director of the Mutter Museum, was outstanding and unforgettable.

Ms. Worden's presentation was not only informative and entertaining but showed a side of science and medicine not usually encountered by the average person. In addition, she treated some of Ninc's conference attendees to a private tour at the

museum located at the College of Physicians, founded in 1787, as an independent medical society. Today it promotes a greater understanding of contemporary and historical medicine through the museum, its library, the Koop Health Information, and College Gallery.

I missed the first tour due to late arrival in Philadelphia and the second due to making the day trip to New York. However, I had been wanting to visit this museum ever since hearing about it seven years ago; so, on Friday I abandoned the convention and found my way to downtown Philly by bus. The museum was located only a half block from where I got off, and, once inside, I lost all track of time, spending the rest of the day totally mesmerized.

The polished wood, gleaming brass rails, and dark oil paintings provoke images of the library of a wealthy—and eccentric—19th century aristocrat. But when Professor Thomas Dent Mutter bequeathed his private collection to the College in 1856, his intent was for it to be a teaching aid, however horrifying, of the human body. Director Worden considers this exhibition “absolutely serious, scientific, and educational. That’s the only way I can justify having human remains on display.”

Still, the museum, though elegant, graceful, and pedagogical, is, to the average visitor, a freak show of monstrously misshapen skulls and bodily remains that do not resemble anything human.

One of the most popular exhibits is the “Soap Lady.” Her body, buried underground, decomposed into a waxy gray substance called adipocere. The museum purchased her for \$7.50 in 1875 when the old museum in Philadelphia was moved. Her identity remains unknown.

Another oddity is the fused liver of the famous Siamese twins, Chang and Eng, who were connected at their chest. The liver is preserved in formaldehyde in a display tray below their death cast.

Other items on display that might

stimulate the more macabre side of the creative mind: Item No. 13,671, a thumb-size brown chunk of flesh which was procured at the post-mortem of Lincoln’s assassin, John Wilkes Booth; a pair of twins who share a single skull; a heart made translucent by chemicals; and, the French woman who had horny protrusions growing all over her body, including one protruding from her forehead which appeared to be about eight inches long.

Winning my vote for the “grossest” specimen was the constipation-racked colon of the Balloon Man, which swelled to eight feet long and 27 inches around before he died.

Another thought-provoking display was the glass-encased skeletons of a 7’6” giant standing beside a 3’6” dwarf.

Gretchen Worden has appeared on David Letterman’s show several times and says the museum is becoming better known because “we’re just so interesting.” That could certainly include the souvenir counter, which offers postcards, tee shirts, refrigerator magnets shaped like the human spine, and key chains adorned with tiny replicas of body parts.

The museum’s photo calendar is also a brisk-selling item. And, like each exhibit, the pictures in the calendar remind of our own mortality, albeit weirdly fascinating, and, perhaps, malevolently beautiful.

Worden’s show-and-tell program was a special treat, something not normally found at writers’ conferences. If you missed hearing her, and you did not make it to the museum, then promise yourself the next time you are in Philadelphia you will schedule at least half a day to visit this truly extraordinary place.

Address: College of Physicians of Philadelphia, 19 South 22nd Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19103-3097.

Reported by Patricia Hagan

Saturday Banquet: Brian Kiley, Speaker

We laughed until we cried, and midway through Brian Kiley’s



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ In other Harlequin-related news, *USA Today* ran an article on the Red Dress Ink novels, priced at \$12.95 for a trade paperback and nary a jester in sight. Harlequin’s idea is that the audience they’re after, young females who devour Ally McBeal and can’t get enough “chick lit” like *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, can look for a new imprint that doesn’t include the H word.

According to the article, the average age of a Harlequin romance reader is 44. There are 32 million American women between 18 and 34, thus the break from a Harlequin logo and any supposed romantic conventions that go with it. See *Jane Date* is the launch title, with an initial print run of 40,000 copies. Former Harlequin/Silhouette editor Melissa Senate is the author and focus of the *USA Today* article. See *Jane Date* is about “a smart, funny 28-year-old editor at a Manhattan publishing house who has been trapped in a two-year date drought. Alas, she must dig up a presentable boyfriend to accompany her to her cousin’s fancy wedding.” And? Guess you’ll just have to race out and buy a copy if you want to know more.

Again, that’s \$12.95 for a trade paperback. With a price tag like that, the jester must think Red Dress Ink has something unique to offer from authors who are awfully damn good.

As the Rumor Mill Churns

Although the situation isn’t exactly a soap opera (yet), Phyllis Grann’s imminent exit from Penguin Putnam is definitely worth watching. Did she sign a non-compete clause? And if so, how long will one of the ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

▶▶▶▶ most commercially successful publishers in the industry have to stay out of the game she's so ferociously good at? Or has she already agreed to go elsewhere once she officially leaves Putnam on 12/31?

And could that elsewhere be... (roll the drums)... Random House? But wait! She could be bringing a cast of characters with her! Big names who love her, mighty cash cows with "key man" provisions in their contracts that allow them to leave Penguin Putnam if she does. And who might these box office stars be?

No, surely not Tom Clancy and (gasp!) Patricia Cornwell! Then again, should another publisher lure them away with the siren call of even bigger \$money\$, what then...?

For answers to these and other edge-of-your-seat questions, be sure to stay tuned for the next episode of *As the Rumor Mill Churns*....

Techno, Financial, and Other Stuff to Boggle the Mind

Okay, I admit it, I've read lots of articles on lots of things that I just don't understand. Internet technology and financial reports are not only BOR-ING, they're usually more convoluted than a bag of pretzel twists. Therefore, we'll employ the KISS approach and, in no particular order, summarize the information that awaits my overflowing trash can.

- Digital rights management company Reciprocal defaulted on a \$10-million bridge loan from Microsoft. Microsoft ceased Reciprocal's operations and are in the process of determining what to do

Continued on p. 17 ▶▶▶



Philly Redux

▶▶▶ performance Kasey Michaels turned to those of us at her table and nailed it. "He's giving us a lesson in timing and pacing we couldn't get elsewhere." For the past few days we'd sat in sessions, sharing, questioning, listening, learning. Then Brian spoke after dinner and capped off the conference with a perfect demonstration of "show, don't tell."

Nine president Barbara Keiler introduced the stand-up comic and five-time Emmy-nominated television writer for *The Conan O'Brien Show*. He has written for the Washington Correspondents Dinner and has also won two Writer's Guild Awards.

Barbara has known Brian, the younger brother of her college friend, Mary Lou, since he was eleven. Barbara said she knew back then that Brian had the tenacity and optimism to be a writer. As a kid, he spent an entire Red Sox game deep under the overhang at Fenway Park, holding up his glove the whole time, even though there was no way a foul ball was coming to him.

Brian told us he'd called Barbara for advice when he decided to be a writer. He said she tried to convince him to write romance, but he didn't think he was talented enough, so he took refuge in television writing. He said he'd written a couple of children's books, but his editors needed to loosen up. "They kept freaking out at the slightest profanity."

He was low-key and dead-funny, and he'd probably cringe at what I'll "lose in the translation" retelling his jokes.

"He had it all," Kasey said as Kiley left the podium. "The slow build, the running gag, timing, pacing."

Delivery is everything, but for those of you who missed them in person, here is my best approximation of some of Brian's gems:

When he found out baby carriages

cost \$300 - \$500, he told his wife, "We're going to have an indoor baby." She, by the way, is a foot shorter than Brian. "She doesn't know I'm bald."

His father is allergic to cotton. "He has pills he can take but he can't get them out of the bottle."

His seven year-old dropped a birthday cake on the kitchen floor and it caught fire. "The cake had those trick candles on it. So the fire department kept coming back."

Brian said he gives blood four times a year so he's less and less related to his extended family.

He once asked a bookstore clerk where the self-help section was. "He said it would defeat the purpose if he told me."

He said he doesn't get it when he sees someone buy a single roll of toilet paper. "I want to ask, 'are you trying to quit?'"

He also wonders about that message on boxes of animal crackers: Don't open if seal is broken.

Reported by Karen Katz

Face-time: Agents

Four agencies were represented on the Face-time: Agents panel.

Charles Schlessiger is from Brandt & Hochman Literary Agents, Inc. They have 20 people working in their offices and 200 clients (back and front list), including Scott Turow, Barbara Keiler, Kate Wilhelm, Joan Aiken, and Peter Tremayne. To approach him send a query letter; referrals from clients are good. It will help if it is the kind of book he feels comfortable selling. He does not handle science fiction.

Fran Collin continues the Marie Riddell Literary Agency, which was begun in 1948. She moved from New York some years ago and now works out of Wayne, PA. (All the panelists agreed that it is not necessary to work out of NYC to be effective.) Collin represents nonfiction and fiction from *Silent Spring* to *Star Trek*. She is the only agent and has one assistant. She has 90 clients. To approach her, send a query letter. She said she would answer a phone call but does not think

it a good way to start. Also, she does represent science fiction but says the bottom has dropped out of it, so she has not sold much recently. She'll handle romance for an author with an established record in romance. She said that she likes good women's fiction and will represent any book she likes.

Claudia Cross is from Sterling Lord Literistic. They have twelve agents and represent fiction ranging from serious to commercial. Women's fiction and romance are welcome. Clients include Rachel Gibson and Gin Ellis. They are always looking for something new. To approach her use a query letter; send sample pages as well—a synopsis and 10-25 pages. Referrals from clients are good; one of your published books is also good. A letter followed by a phone call is okay, but don't call first. She returns calls and e-mails from clients promptly.

Scott Miller of Trident Media says their agency includes seven agents who moved from William Morris as well as 15 other staffers. They represent all types of commercial fiction and narrative nonfiction with 200 clients, including Catherine Coulter, Janet Evanovich, and Georgia Bockhoven. They also place celebrity autobiographies. Trident is a full-service agency, selling all book and subsidiary rights; they work with an LA agency for film rights. To approach Miller, send a query letter describing yourself, your history, and the new book you are working on; follow up with a phone call in a week.

All will handle e-books; all work with foreign rights agents and know coast people to contact for film and TV rights. Agents specializing in foreign rights are necessary because of language problems and the complicated tax forms involved.

The agents agreed that 15 percent commission is standard for US sales, 20 percent for foreign. A 20 percent fee is charged for permissions to quote from a client's material. No one favored split commissions, though Collin said she will agree to this in the case of a "bitter divorce" with a client. Cross said there is no problem getting

the money to the author quickly if necessary.

An interesting aside: Fran Collin told about the FTC coming after agents some 15 years ago because they all charged the standard rate of 10 percent (15 percent foreign). They were charged with restraint of trade, and the FTC threatened to sue the agents' association, only dropping criminal charges when the agents' association agreed that not all their members would be held to the 10 percent fee.

Trident Media does not charge for office costs—copying, postage, etc. The other three agents all said they would charge for copying if costs are high (for example, making 15 copies of a 400-page manuscript for simultaneous submissions) or for high foreign postage costs. This charge would be subtracted from the author's share of the advance upon sale.

All participants agreed that they advise clients on career building and planning. Claudia Cross suggests asking "where do you want to be?" and "how do I get there?"

Questions covered a wide range of topics. One was "break-out" novels, or trying something new. Ms. Collin said she doesn't think an author can just say he/she is going to do this. Both she and Ms. Cross want authors to write what they want to write; but authors must realize that it might be a tough sell.

Charles Schlessiger said it's very difficult for an agent to sell something he doesn't like. Because an editor has to fall in love with a manuscript to buy it, the agent has to love it, too. Miller mentioned a client who has changed genres so often, editors don't know what to expect from him. It makes selling his work difficult, and his career has no momentum; there are no bigger advances with each sale, and foreign markets don't know how to market him.

One questioner wanted to know about breaking off a relationship with an agent. None of the agents felt that this was a problem. All agreed that the personal relationship dictates whether this should be done on the phone or by letter. Cross said breakups were

covered in the contract and should be done by letter. Schlessiger's agency works on a handshake rather than a written contract; however, the agency contract is part of the book contract, so their representation on that book remains in effect. Once rights revert to the author, the contract with the agency on that book ends. Any unsold subsidiary rights belong to the author. When leaving an agency, the author may specify by letter that any rights still unsold belong to the author.

Only Schlessiger was brave enough to answer the question on future trends. He said it is "chick lit." Cross said she is nervous about trends, since there's no knowing how long they will last.

Do we need agents? Miller suggests that an agent usually deals better with an editor. Schlessiger feels the agent has to be worth 15 percent of the money obtained. Cross said to ask yourself: Have you ever had subsidiary rights sold? Are you happy with where you are? If the answer to either of these is no, then you probably need an agent.

But Ninc member Georgia Bockhoven provided the best answer. She and a friend sold to the same publisher, Georgia with an agent, her friend without. There was a huge difference between the two contracts, and Georgia's was definitely better.

On the perennial question of literary attorneys versus literary agents, participants seem to agree that it depends on your confidence in your agent. Scott Miller is an attorney but does not work as such. He thinks you should ask yourself if the money is worth it. He said there are instances when an attorney is necessary and he would recommend one. Cross said to ask yourself if you would feel better having an attorney look things over. Collin added that agents are very good with contracts.

Trident Media moved soon after the conference. The new address is:
Trident Media
Carnegie Hall Tower
152 West 57th Street, 16th floor
New York, NY 10019

Reported by Annette Mahon

The year 2001 is winding down, and as you read this column, you might be contemplating in the back of your mind all those wonderful New Year's resolutions that you plan to make on December 31. Play solitaire less often. Read more. Write more. Promote more.

Might I also suggest the following resolutions to help you take advantage of all the opportunities and information that Novelists, Inc. offers you online?

Resolution 1: Bookmark the Novelists, Inc. website, <http://www.ninc.com> so you can visit it often and with ease.

Resolution 2: Pick up the Novelists, Inc. logo, <http://www.ninc.com/authors.asp>, and place it on your website to help promote this wonderful writers' organization.

Resolution 3: Visit the Links to Ninc Authors page. If you are not listed, send your URL to newlinks@ninc.com. Be sure to include your name as it appears on the roster because membership is verified before links are posted. If you are listed, verify that your URL is correct or current. With many of us now purchasing our domain name, we need to remember to update our links when we change our site URL. To report a change to your URL, send e-mail to link-change@ninc.com.

Resolution 4: Use NEXTPAGE, <http://www.ninc.com/nextpg.asp>, as a promotional tool. NEXTPAGE is Novelists, Inc.'s listing of members' upcoming releases. Neff Rotter maintains the page. "Since I put up three months at a time (past, present and coming), people should send me their titles two months in advance of publication if they want them listed all three times. On the other hand, I'm perfectly happy for people to send me their whole year's worth of books at any time and I'll put them up when the time comes." Send the titles of upcoming books to Neff (neff@belgravehouse.com) with your name and pseudonym (if applicable), title, publisher, and ISBN number, if known.

Resolution 5: Register for a Members Only Password so you can access the Agent Guide, members' e-mail addresses, and other Members Only perks.

Resolution 6: Once you've received your password, you can access the Dues Renewal statement if you misplaced or did not receive the one sent to you via snail mail. Remember that dues are due by January 15, 2002.

Resolution 7: Check out the Agent Guide. Julie Kistler worked diligently on Ninc's Agent Listing. This agent area is invaluable and was discussed in my June 2001 Online column (you can access previous Online columns in the Archived section of the site). The e-mail address for reporting additions or corrections has changed but can be accessed from the page.

Resolution 8: Take advantage of the Research/Resource Links in the Members Only section. Often members post requests for information on Ninlink and may find that the information is readily available on this page.

Resolution 9: Browse the site and become familiar with the wonderful sources of information that the organization has made available to us online. The president's column is archived. Several articles from previous issues of *NINK* are also available.

Resolution 10: Subscribe to Ninlink, NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoogroups.com, so you can network with members.

Promotion

Romance Reviews Today, <http://www.romrevtoday.com>, has celebrated its one year anniversary. Visit the site to inquire about:

1. Having a book reviewed.
2. Being interviewed.
3. Listing an upcoming release.
4. Sharing an announcement.

Romance and Friends, <http://www.romanceandfriends.com>, offers reviews, a message board, and author chats. They are also in the process of updating the Authors Lounge to include a list of promotional opportunities, so you might want to keep an eye on that site.

The Hopeful Romantic, <http://www.thehopefulromantic.com>, now offers free membership. You still have to register before you can browse the site, but a fee is no longer required.

Research

If you are looking for images, try the latest in search engines: *Google Image Search*, <http://images.google.com>. A search for images of Hyde Park gave me 7,390 images to browse. A bit much to be sure, but the site can still prove helpful, especially if you want to view scenery from a particular city or country.

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Patricia de la Fuente	Patricia@hiline.net
Lorraine Heath	lorraine-heath@home.com

Freedom Rings

In the wake of the September 11 tragedies, people continue to come together to help those in need and to support those who place themselves in harm's way.

Authors United for America, <http://www.pageonelit.com/Tragedy/AuthorProject.html>, has taken on a project of collecting essays. It is hoped that the project might be turned into a book "with the proceeds going to the families of the disaster." For more information or to express your desire to participate, visit the site.

Laura Resnick continues to collect books to send to the troops. For more information, you can e-mail her at LaResnick@aol.com. In addition to Operation Paperback, <http://oppaperback.virtualave.net/>, mentioned last month, The Message of Hope Book Drive, <http://www.knology.net/~leahmarie/mohbd.html>, is also accepting book donations. In addition to military

addresses, this site provides the addresses for hospitals in New York and Washington.

OUTLOOK® Tip of the Month

You can "flag" an e-mail so that it's easier to notice before or after it's read. You can also flag it while you have it open. Whether the letter is open or closed:

- Click Message.
- Click Flag.

A little flag will appear beside it, helping it stand out from the other letters in your inbox.

Novelists, Inc. Listserve

At www.yahoogroups.com/group/NINCLINK, you can learn more about Ninclink, subscribe, or set your preferences (digest, individual posts, etc.).

If you discover sites that you think would interest Novelists, Inc. members, please e-mail me at lorraine-heath@home.com.

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Editor's Farewell

This is my last issue as *NINK* editor. I'm happy to be turning over my editorial pencil to Jasmine Cresswell, one of our founding members. I know she'll do a great job.

Serving with this activist board of directors has been a rewarding and fulfilling experience. Thanks to the board for encouragement and help, and thanks to those of you who contributed, cajoled, and commended my efforts. I've enjoyed working with all of you.

— Pam Browning



BREAKING NEWS

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with Reciprocal's remaining assets.

• Amazon.com's revenues fell 12.1 percent in their books/music/video division during the third quarter, which ended September 30, ending at \$351.4 million. The group's pro forma operating income (whatever that is) increased six percent to \$26.2 million. Jeff Bezos remains excited about Amazon's used-product sales, with 17 percent of their U.S. orders coming from said venue in that same quarter. CFO Warren Jenson said it was hard to tell if new book sales were being cannibalized by used book sales.

• SimonSaysShop.com is the launch site of Simon and Schuster's new e-bookstore. Customers can download hundreds of e-books from S&S, with initial pricing at 20 percent below the retail price. As an incentive, S&S is offering four original e-books as freebies, including a *Star Trek* title and two from V.C. Andrews. Additionally, for less than \$5, some Stephen King e-books will be available, along with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer #1: Prophecies*, for the promotional price of a dollar.

• The ABA and BookScan have agreed to work together in reporting book sales. BookScan is developing an automatic reporting system for bestseller data. ABA stores will work with the data-collection systems used by ABA members. The data will go into the system provided by BookScan, and the ABA will add the necessary reporting for their Book Sense Bestseller lists. Currently, 350 or so stores report, and it's the hope of ABA head Avin Mark Domnitz that the agreement with BookScan will push that number

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Laura Resnick is

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“OW! OW! OWWWW!!!”

“A critic,” a friend recently quoted to me, “is someone who goes out on the field after the battle and shoots the wounded.”

One of the most professionally educational books I’ve ever read is *No Turn Unstoned*, compiled by actress Diana Rigg. The book is a collection of some of the most devastating and venomous theatrical reviews ever written. *No Turn Unstoned* taught me several valuable lessons about reviews before I ever began my writing career. It thereby helped me gain a sense of perspective which I desperately need on occasions when I read comments about my work like this one (from an Amazon.com reader review): “The one good recommendation I can give it is that it is a great cure for insomnia.”

One of the things I learned when I read *No Turn Unstoned* is that there have been nasty critics almost as long as there have been writers and actors. Rigg’s book quotes scathing theatrical reviews written by social commentators as early as the sixth century B.C.! Another useful lesson I keep in mind is that no writer or actor has ever completely eluded the venom of a critic’s pen. Dorothy Parker wrote of Katharine Hepburn’s performance in a 1933 play, *The Lake*, that she ran the gamut of emotion from A to B. When Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Ernest* first opened, a reviewer wrote, “The thing seemed to me so helpless, so crude, so bad, clumsy, feeble, and vulgar...”

Bertrand Russell said of George Bernard Shaw’s *Man and Superman*, “It disgusted me.” Imagine, for a moment, being the actress of whom a critic wrote, “What a personality that girl needs.” Diana Rigg, still my heroine from her days as the elegant and deadly Mrs. Peel in *The Avengers*, bravely includes a casually vicious review about herself from *New York Magazine* which she found so wounding that, “I remember making my way to the theatre the following day, darting from doorway to doorway and praying I wouldn’t meet anyone I knew.”

And speaking of casually vicious reviews...

“Soapy and predictable and long-winded” is what *Kirkus* said about a novel of mine. *Kirkus* also said of a romantic suspense novel by Ninc member Carole Bellacera, “It’s neither romantic nor suspenseful.” Indeed, *Kirkus* reviews are so notoriously nasty that I’ve heard that the publicity depart-

ment at my publishing house makes a game of deliberately culling any accidentally positive phrases from bad *Kirkus* reviews and using them for promotional purposes. If true, this would explain why they went to all the trouble of culling a comically brief quote (“Well handled”) from the scathing *Kirkus* review of *In Legend Born* even though there were enough good reviews of the book that this certainly wasn’t necessary. (The *Kirkus* review from which they culled this two-word “praise” indicated that a couple of minor elements are well handled in an otherwise awful novel.)

Now that I think of it, though—what a great game! I can hardly wait for *Kirkus*’ blistering review of my next novel so that I can play, too!

Scathingly castigating flossweat

However, I am forced to admit that *Kirkus*’s scathing review of my book is a fair and valid example of a bad review; it simply expresses a negative opinion of the work. No matter how painful the writer may find such commentary, this is a legitimate (even necessary) function of a book reviewer.

As reviewer and Ninc member Ann LaFarge notes, the issues a reviewer should address in a review are: “Did the writer accomplish what he was trying to do? If so, how? If not, why not?” Novelist P.G. Nagle suggests, “Negative reviews should be stated in a rational manner. Any person with a reasonable command of both himself and the English language should be able to express a negative opinion without resorting to insult. Objections should be explained, and opinionated statements should be supported.”

Art is subjective; therefore, of course, opinions about a novel will always be varied and often even conflicting. I certainly don’t *enjoy* bad reviews, but I accept that disliking my work is a perfectly fair and valid response when reviewing it.

However, when reviewers get absorbed in their own speculative theories, make inaccurate accusations, are deliberately cruel, or get inappropriately personal, many writers—understandably—get annoyed.

Bill Peschel, a reviewer for a newspaper in South Carolina, once wrote that mystery author Tamar Myers was obviously “trying to write like Carolyn Hart and Joan Hess, but fails miserably,” and added that “the book smells of flossweat.” Since Myers had never read Hart or Hess at that point in her career, the real mystery is how she could possi-

bly have been trying to emulate them. "And," Myers wonders, "what the hell is flossweat? Sixteen very successful books later I would like to present Mr. Peschel with a vial of vile flossweat."

A critic in Albany said in a review of Tess Gerritsen's *Gravity*: "She has seen her books reach the bestseller lists, but it's almost impossible to understand why." In a review of *Bloodstream*, this same critic wrote, "[Gerritsen's] success as a writer is a sorry indicator of how far the book-buying public's standards have sunk. If quality was the determining factor, Gerritsen [a doctor] might well be on the phone as we speak, contacting health care companies for per-diem work."

Perhaps you've already noticed that in two sentences comprising a total of more than forty words, this reviewer hasn't actually said a single thing about *Bloodstream* itself, but has instead spent his time castigating Gerritsen's readers and attempting to humiliate Gerritsen. Moreover, this reviewer was evidently too busy being clever to bother actually *reading*, since both of these reviews were based on audio books. I agree with Gerritsen, who asks, "How can reviewers judge our books based on an audio [version] that includes only about a third of our text?"

The reviewer in Albany isn't alone in writing vicious reviews of Gerritsen's work. A *Publisher's Weekly* review of her suspense novel *Harvest* said snidely: "Will surprise only readers who move their lips." Happily for Gerritsen, *Harvest* went on to become her first hardcover *New York Times* bestseller.

And speaking of snide PW reviews...

Mystery series author Kathy Lynn Emerson has lately endured this gem in *PW*: "Forecast: The thinness of the last two or three books of what started as a solid historical series suggests the author has lost interest and is just churning

them out; readers will continue to lose interest as well." Personally, I'm quite taken with the delusions of omniscience revealed here. Despite the evidence we've just seen with regard to *Harvest*, that *PW* reviewers' tastes are clearly not in lock-step with readers' tastes, this *PW* reviewer now goes well past stating his own response to the current book and chooses to predict how readers will respond to Emerson's future work! Moreover, the reviewer presumes to know what's in the writer's mind, claiming (erroneously) that Emerson has grown bored with her own work. Finally, he also deliberately insults the writer with the (also erroneous) phrase "churning them out." Really, it boggles my mind to see this reviewer taking so many missteps in a single sentence.

PW: So what? Who cares?

Years ago, historian Barbara Tuchman took *PW* to task when one of their anonymous reviewers claimed that Tuchman's latest book contained historical inaccuracies. By the time Tuchman was done with *PW*, it was clear that the reviewer had merely used the shield of anonymity to make unfounded accusations which he couldn't prove or defend. Ever since then, I've frankly wondered why on earth anyone cares what *PW* thinks about *anything*, as well as why anyone in the world thinks there's anything of value in anonymous reviews in any forum.

Frankly, I despise anyone who exercises the privilege of publicly criticizing a writer's work but who is unwilling to *identify himself* in his public comments. I consider such behavior beneath contempt.

I also think that anonymous reviews are pointless, in that they inherently suggest that all people are alike and will all respond the same way to a book. How absurd! After all, one editor considers a given novel unpublishable while another loves it and snaps



BREAKING NEWS

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up to 600 stores.

- iUniverse received financing from global financial giant Warburg Pincus (it's a company, not a person...I think), to the tune of \$18 million. The money will be spent to expand iUniverse's already long reach in publishing technology. That reach includes their agreement with *Weekly Reader*, which we covered in a previous BN column and was a heck of a lot more interesting than this long piece on their finances that nobody cares about anyway.

Well, thank goodness that's done. Boring, boring, boring, and where's the Advil, please?

Bring Back the Chihuahua

Never mind the Advil, make it a martini. Wait, hold the Absolut. There was one item of interest, actually two, so here's our reward for slugging through the rest: Jeff Bezos appeared in a Taco Bell commercial on the Web to promote their half price chalupas. And, in a more humanitarian vein, Amazon's fundraising drive on the Web raised \$6 million for victims of the 9/11 attacks.

Mail Problems

There's not really much else to tell you—actually, there is plenty of this and that left, but none of it's important—except for reports on how the anthrax scare has affected the handling of mail on Publisher's Row.

Apparently many houses are only opening mail they're expecting, and authors should e-mail editors with queries first. *PW Newsline* reported that S&S and Harper aren't accepting mail that's not addressed to a specific individual, and S&S is discarding all packages from sources they consider unknown. *The New Yorker* is accepting

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THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

►►► it up. I have friends whose reading recommendations I take, and friends whose tastes I've learned are so different from mine that I deliberately avoid their recommendations. So if I don't know the identity of the reviewer and can't learn his tastes, of what possible use is a review to me as a reader or a movie-goer? Publishing anonymous reviews, in addition to being morally contemptible, suggests that I'm such a dolt that I'm willing to be guided by *anyone's* opinion, without having the slightest idea upon what tastes it's based.

And speaking of anonymous reviews...

One of the biggest changes we've seen in the world of book reviewing in recent years is the Internet's making available an ever-expanding number of opportunities for readers to review books in public forums. The Internet has reader e-lists, reader bulletin boards, reader online fanzines, small start-up online magazines which publish reviews provided by readers, and online bookstores which encourage readers to post reviews of the books they read—anonously, if they choose.

While this has been great for readers in numerous ways, it can be a mixed blessing for novelists. I myself very rarely read my reviews on Amazon.com, the online bookseller best known for its reader reviews. Novelist Teresa Medeiros perfectly sums up my feelings about it: "I'm embarrassed to admit that I'm a complete wimp when it comes to Amazon reader reviews. They cut me to the heart. They leave a lingering ache in my stomach. They suck the creative soul right out of me... I enjoy the good reviews, but sometimes even those are disconcerting, like having somebody watch you go to the bathroom. And it doesn't matter if a book has fifty positive reviews, it's that one negative one that will haunt me for days." Exactly!

Indeed, when collecting anecdotes for this column, it soon became clear to me that many writers struggle with the phenomenon of Amazon.com's reader reviews. What bothers writers about reader reviews are the same things that cause them to complain about professional reviews; writers wince when a review is deliberately vicious, but it makes them nuts when a reader, as Jean Ross Ewing a.k.a. Julia Ross puts it, makes accusations or statements which simply aren't true. As an example, Ewing cites an Amazon.com reader review of her award-winning novel *Flowers Under the Ice*, which this particular reader review describes as "creepy." The reviewer claims the book's love story is "sadistic," and she clearly implies the hero is sexually abu-

sive, even a rapist. Ewing says, "I believe it unfairly misrepresents the book, as well as making horrendous implications about my sexual philosophy." (Having read the book myself, by the way, I certainly find the reader's comments perplexing.)

Moving from the surreal to the absurd...

A bad Amazon.com reader review for Patricia Bray's *The Irish Earl* complains the book was a disappointment because (wait for it!), "One literally had to read the entire book until the conflict was resolved." (Damn! All these years in the business, and I never knew I was supposed to wrap up the conflict halfway through the book!)

An Amazon.com reader review slammed *Mr. Perfect*, author Linda Howard says, "because I didn't write at least one paragraph about the heroine emptying the cat's litter box. Obviously litter plays a big part in this woman's life, and she was outraged that I didn't acknowledge it." Novelist Ann Chamberlin quotes a furious review from a reader who apparently doesn't know what a fantasy novel is, and who doesn't necessarily even seem to know what *fiction* is. Speaking of fantasy, an Amazon reader says that I seem "to falter in the historical department somewhat;" the work in question is a fantasy novel, set in a completely make-believe world, so I have no idea what "historical" flaws the reader could be talking about.

Accusing the author of bad research or historical inaccuracy is, by the way, a common habit of professional and amateur reviewers which many writers find particularly aggravating; especially since such critics very rarely present credentials for their "superior" knowledge of the author's subject matter, let alone make specific citations of the inaccuracies they claim to have found. A bookseller who writes reviews for the *Denver Post* reveals a strange reason for reading historical mysteries when he writes of three books he's reviewing (two of which are by Ninc members): "All three provide just enough historical inaccuracies to make knowledgeable readers feel sufficiently superior to the authors..." Clearly self-deluding reviewers will also feel superior.

Another common habit of critics which makes writers grind their teeth is that of claiming the author is unsuccessfully attempting to copy a given novel or novelist. One newspaper reviewer, for example, accused Linda Howard of stealing the plot of Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray*, a novel she had never read and which she later learned bore no resemblance whatsoever to her own. (Having read both books, I can testify that the reviewer's accusation is indeed inexplicable.)

Overall, the conclusion I've come to over the years is that nasty and sloppy book reviewers would probably go about their work very differently if *they* were victims of the sort of careless, ignorant, and scathing public commentary that we must regularly endure as novelists. Since that's not

likely to happen very soon, however, I continue to follow advice which an acting teacher of mine, years ago, attributed to Sir Lawrence Olivier: "If the reviews are bad, you can't believe them. If the reviews are good, you can't believe them. Your job is just to go out there and do your very best work every show, eight shows per week."

Sure, it's hard to face the blank page after reading a bad review; but at least it's not as hard as facing a *live audience* would be right after I read a comment like, "Resnick's attempt to make you like the characters failed miserably. Altogether a boring and unenjoyable book."

The Comedy Curmudgeon would like to thank everyone who was brave enough to share their scathing reviews with her for this month's column. There was such an embarrassment of riches that she wasn't able to use all of the material she received, but she deeply appreciates (and winces at) all of it.



BREAKING NEWS

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pages from UPS and Fed Ex only.

Unfortunately, those are the only specifics I have to relate, and things could change at any time. If anyone has information to share on this, or any other subject of interest to our members, please send it via e-mail to me at mrush11155@cs.com.

Olivia Rupprecht is an award-winning author who swears her books are more entertaining than much of what she consumes and spits out

DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

What Playing Computer Solitaire Has Taught Me About Writing

BY PAT McLAUGHLIN

- ♣ You can't play unless you turn on the computer and sit down in front of it.
- ♣ You can't win if you don't play.
- ♣ Once you start, it's hard to quit. So starting's the key.
- ♣ You will almost always dip into negative figures before you start to win.
- ♣ You don't really lose until you stop playing.
- ♣ No matter how deep a hole you get into, persistence over time can (sometimes) get you out.
- ♣ You need skill and luck.
- ♣ Sometimes luck deserts you, and no matter how much skill you have, you just have to wait for the luck to turn.
- ♣ Skill is the only one of those two aspects you control.
- ♣ Even with great skill, you need concentration to apply it.
- ♣ Sometimes, when all your moves up and down are blocked, you can break out of the logjam by moving sideways.
- ♣ The most boring part is when you can see how all the cards will play out but you have to persist

and put them in place in order to be rewarded with dancing cards and more money in your total.

♣ The one piece that you needed to open up the previous game and that remained stubbornly hidden throughout that previous game, will now jump up on the board for the next game and do a rude tap dance in front of you, flaunting itself.

♣ You see more moves when you give yourself a break and view a setup with fresh eyes.

♣ (This one applies specifically to romance writing.) In order to win the game, the king has to follow the queen to the top (referring to emotions, of course—what did you think I meant?)

♣ Some games nothing goes right, in a few games everything goes right.

♣ Those games where everything goes right seem like flukes.

♣ Those games where nothing goes right seem like your destiny.

♣ Providing you're applying the same level of skill, they're both flukes.

♣ The games where everything goes right are boring.

♣ The most satisfying games are the ones where it looks as if it's going totally wrong, but you pull it out.

♣ When it comes to gambling, my money is much better spent on conferences, writing supplies, and mailing costs than trying to play solitaire in Las Vegas.

Pat McLaughlin is not playing much computer solitaire these days because (a) she's working on her 18th romance novel (17th for Silhouette Special Edition) writing as Patricia McLinn or (b) she's learned all the lessons it can teach or (c) she's discovered Freecell.

MEMBER NEWS.....Compiled by Kathy Chwedyk

Julie Pottinger Appears On *The Weakest Link*

Julie Pottinger, who writes as Julia Quinn, was a recent contestant on the popular prime-time game show, *The Weakest Link*. The taped segment is tentatively scheduled for telecast on Sunday, December 9.

Pottinger is contractually barred from revealing the outcome of the show (a leak results in a million dollar fine!) but it's probably safe to say that she wasn't voted off first if she's actually telling people about it. *The Weakest Link* is hosted by Anne Robinson and airs on NBC, 8 p.m. Eastern and Pacific, 7 p.m. Central and Mountain time zones.

Pottinger's current release is *An Offer From A Gentleman* by Julia

Quinn, a July release from Avon Books.

Jean Ross Ewing Wins Colorado Book Award

Jean Ross Ewing has just won the Colorado Book Award for the second year in a row. *My Dark Prince*, her 2000 Jove release written as Julia Ross, won this year's award, given annually by the Colorado Center for the Book (CCFTB), an affiliate of the Library of Congress, to the best books of the previous year written by Colorado authors.

Lynn Sherr from ABC News was the keynote speaker at the gala event at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts where the winners were announced. Jean won the

Colorado Book Award last year for her 1999 novel *Flowers Under Ice*.

Her next release will be *The Seduction* by Julia Ross, a Berkley trade paperback scheduled for June, 2002.

Hailstock Places In Clara Awards

Neighborhood Press has announced the winners of the Clara Awards, and Shirley Hailstock is a winner in four of the categories: Hailstock captured first place in the Best Romance Novel for *Opposites Attract*; second place in the Best Mystery/Suspense category for *More Than Gold*; third place in the Best Mystery/Suspense category for *White Diamonds*; and second place in the Best Historical Romance category for *Clara's Promise*.

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

Fast Track.....Compiled by Vella Munn

Fast Track is a monthly report listing Novelists, Inc. members on the USA Today Top 150 bestseller list. Internet surfers can find the complete list at: <http://www.usatoday.com>

NINK's new *Fast Track* reporter is Vella Munn. If you would like to alert her to your upcoming releases, please contact her at munn@attglobal.net

* et al. additional authors who are not Ninc members at this time

USA TODAY BESTSELLER LIST October, 2001

Susan Albert, *Mistletoe Man*, Berkley
Madeline Baker, *Chase the Lightning*, Leisure
Jo Beverley, *Christmas Angel*, Zebra
Catherine Coulter, *Impulse*, Signet
Christina Dodd, *In My Wildest Dreams*, Avon
Julie Garwood, *Heartbreaker*, Pocket

Sandra Hill, Kate Holmes, et al*, *Here Comes Santa Claus*, Leisure
Elizabeth Lowell, *Beautiful Dreamer*, Avon
Nora Roberts, *Hidden Star*, Silhouette
Nora Roberts, *Captive Star*, Silhouette
Nora Roberts, *Midnight Bayou*, Putnam
Nora Roberts, *Time and Again*, Silhouette
Nora Roberts, *Secret Star*, Silhouette
Nora Roberts, Jill Gregory, et al*, *Once Upon a Rose*, Jove

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