

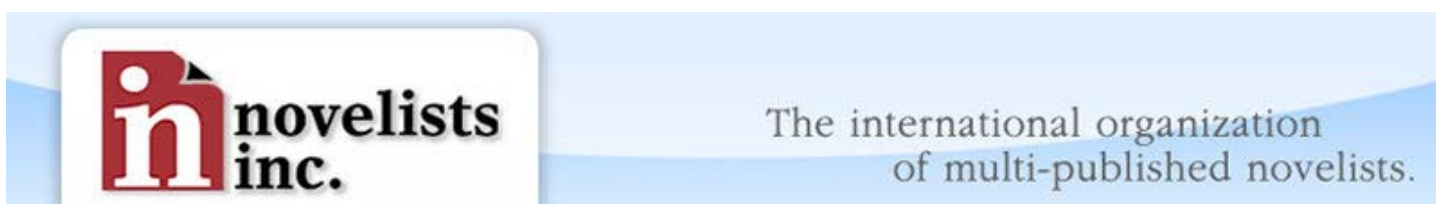
# N I N K

April 2009  
Vol. 20, No. 4

## Ninc.com Is Comprehensive Resource

PATI NAGLE, CO-CHAIR PUBLIC PAGES

GINGER CHAMBERS, CO-CHAIR MEMBERS ONLY PAGES



Have you been to the website lately? Since the big overhaul last year, Ninc.com is better looking, much easier to navigate, and contains a lot of wonderful new, easy-to-use features.



Maybe you've already checked out part of the website, the **Ninc Blog**. In the six months since it launched, the Ninc Blog has received over 68,000 hits. This is a great place to announce your latest release, or to share your anecdotes about writing (fans love to hear about the writer's life).



Two more great new ways for members to stay visible at Ninc.com are taking advantage of new release promotion for members and Ninc's Member Appearances calendar.

**The Next Page** now includes full-color cover art for those who send in jpegs of their latest releases along with their listing information, and the covers for the current month go into a rotating image on Ninc's home page.

The **Member Appearances** page includes event listings for any Ninc member who submits them, with teasers on every page of the website's public area. If you'll be appearing somewhere and you want your fans to know the date and time, here's your chance to get that word out there.

**Our Members** also features a listing of member websites for readers seeking more information about your books.



Of course you're planning to attend Ninc Goes Platinum in Saint Louis in October. Everything you need to know is listed in the **Conference** section of the website, including discussion loops for travel buddies and roommates, and frequent updates as they are announced. There are also photos from past conferences for you to enjoy.



Do you have friends who are interested in joining Ninc? Point them to the **Join Ninc** section, with its new, easy-to-understand directions to apply for membership. Prospective members can also download a recent copy of eNink.

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## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

### Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne*	Linda Barlow	Pat Rice
Janice Young Brooks*	Georgia Bockoven	Anne Holmberg
Jasmine Cresswell*	Evan Maxwell	Jean Brashear
Maggie Osborne*	Victoria Thompson	Vicki Lewis Thompson
Marianne Shock*	Steven Womack	Brenda Hiatt Barber
* Founder	Barbara Keiler	Pat McLaughlin

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

### 2009 Board of Directors

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### 2009 Committees

<b>2009 Conference</b> Co-Chairs: Karen Tintori Katz & Leslie LaFoy Eileen Dreyer Marcia Evanic Sally Hawkes Melinda Haynes	<b>Elections</b> Chair: Sylvie Kurtz	Marianna Jameson
<b>Anthology</b> Chair: Lillian Stewart Carl Phoebe Conn Denise Dietz Winnie Griggs JoAnn Grote Sylvie Kurtz Garda Parker	<b>Member Retention</b> Chair: Barbara Bretton	<b>Volunteer Jobs List Coordinator</b> Mary Glazer
<b>Authors Coalition Reps</b> Deborah Gordon Elaine Isaak	<b>Membership</b> Chair: Holly Jacobs	<b>Website</b> Chair: Pati Nagle
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<b>Discounts</b> Chair: Pat McLaughlin Dianne Despain J. C. Wilder	<b>Nominating</b> Chair: Pat Rice Lou Aronica Holly Jacobs Fran Baker Claudia Dain David Walker	<b>Website Volunteers:</b> Denise Agnew Fran Baker Robin Bayne Dara Girard Laurie Alice Eakes Chris Marie Green Megan Hart Sally Hawkes Elaine Isaak Mary Kilchenstein Loree Lough Susan Lyons Joe Nassise Patricia Rosemoor Neff Rotter Patricia Sargeant-Matthews Linnea Sinclair Sasha White
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	<b>Renewals Coordinator</b> Delilah Devlin	
	<b>Royalty Statement</b> Chair: Allison Brennan	

### Central Coordinator:

Tonya Wilkerson, Varney and Assoc.  
Novelists, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2037  
Manhattan KS 66505  
Fax: 785-537-1877  
ninc@varney.com

### Website:

<http://www.ninc.com>

Address changes may be made on the website.

For members without Internet access, send changes to the Central Coordinator.

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## Introducing...

The following authors have applied for membership in Ninc and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of Ninc. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

Membership Chair Holly Jacobs  
P.O. Box 11102  
Erie PA 16514-1102  
or email [HollyJacobs1@aol.com](mailto:HollyJacobs1@aol.com)

### New Applicants:

Edith Bruce, Ottawa Ontario, Canada  
Michele Scott, San Diego, CA

### New Members:

Beth Daniels, Engelwood OH  
Sarah Worth, Houston TX  
Heather MacAllister, Houston TX  
Lisa Chaplin, Rudlingen, Switzerland  
Mary Burton, Richmond VA  
Michele Ann Young, Richmond Hill Ontario  
Rhonda Woodward, Phoenix AZ  
Marianne Mancusi, Astoria NY

### Ninc has room to grow...

Recommend membership to your colleagues.

Prospective members may apply online at

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

Refer members at ninc.com. Go to Members Only,

"Member Services" and click

"Refer a New Member to Ninc."

Take Ninc brochures to conferences.

Email Pari Taichert with your mailing address and

requested number of booklets.

[ptaichert@comcast.net](mailto:ptaichert@comcast.net).

### Ninc Statement of Principle.

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

# Hey, Ninc - what Have You Done For Me Lately?

**KASEY MICHAELS**  
**PRESIDENT 2009**

Well, thank you, so glad you asked...

When I got roped into, er, when I came onboard the Board, I thought I knew what Ninc was all about. After all, I'd been a member for dogs years.

Ninc was the newsletter and Ninlink. It was the conference whenever I could attend. But, yeah, that's about it.

Okay, so when I'm wrong, I'm wrong, and I'll admit to it.

Did you know we have a Yahoo critique group? Bet you didn't. I didn't.

You might not know about the Yahoo Health Insurance group or the Young Adult Yahoo loop for those of us interested in writing for the that genre, because those two are fairly new. But we've got them, and any member can join by zipping over to the website. And we'll start new specialized loops on any subject – just let us know what you'd like to see. Yes, there are loops all over the Internet. But our loops are peopled only by multi-published, career novelists. So why go to strangers?

Oh, right, about the website. There's a great cover story this month by the two hardest-working volunteers we've had in a long time, Pati Nagle and Ginger Chambers, telling us all about the fantastic, new, revamped, expanded (and even pretty!) website. Read the article – you'll be amazed.

I know you'll be amazed because, having just survived renewal season, I now know that there are lot of members who haven't signed in and looked around the <http://ninc.com> website since the last time they changed their email addresses ... maybe five, six years ago. If the Board fielded five queries asking for help finding passwords, we fielded forty or more. Plus a couple of emails that went sort of like this: "We have a website?"

So read the article, then log on and go look around, okay? If you need your password, give a holler. [kcmi@aol.com](mailto:kcmi@aol.com)

Before I had to read Ninlink every day (part of the job description), during crunch times or when hitting up against a deadline, I would sometimes try to save the digest for when I had a few free moments (and then not read it – you know, like that leftover half-a-hoagie that you save because you're going to eat it, until it grows penicillin mold in the fridge and is then discarded). But, usually, I just hit delete during those times. I cringe to think of how much I missed using that method.

Now, reading my digest every day, I've learned a lot about the YA market, and how to tell if a tippler is actually an alcoholic. I got to congratulate two of our members for their nominations for Edgars. Kensington Publishing just moved its offices. I know their new address – do you? I read member suggestions on how long blood evidence remains in someone's mouth — don't ask, it was a good question, and got good answers from other members.

Other discussions you missed if you don't belong to Ninlink (just a very small sampling):

Great New Music Websites.

What Writers Want Editors To Know.

When Does Mercury Go Out of Retrograde?

Using Real People and Places in Fiction

I Can Quote How Much of a Song?

I Want To Kill My Copyeditor. Will Any Jury

Convict Me?

Help For Carpal Tunnel: Better Keyboards,  
Ergonomic Desk Chairs.

Fabulous Books: Reading Suggestions.

Again, that's just a small sample. When I open my Ninlink digest, I never know what I'm going to find. But I do know it's the best, most honest and diverse loop out there for career novelists, that it

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## President's Voice

is writers helping writers, and often a whole lot of fun for those of us who are isolated in our offices, cut off from the world.

Yet a full thirty percent of Ninc members do not subscribe to

Ninlink! Quick, while you're thinking about it, copy this address into an email, and find out what all you've been missing: [Ninlink-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:Ninlink-subscribe@yahoo.com)

While we're into "what am I missing?" let's talk about this newsletter for a minute. Do you subscribe to eNink, and then often forget to read it on your computer or print it out? Do you get your *Nink* in the mail and then promptly lose it somewhere in those Black Holes we call our offices? For shame! Because you've missed:

How to make extra money and promote your career through public speaking, freelance editing and teaching.

The ins and outs of buying health insurance.

Retirement accounts for the working writer.

How to keep up your creativity when the business has you down.

The e-publishing alternative.

Lou Aronica's insider's look at publishing.

Think about the other newsletters and publications you receive – do any of them give you this kind of practical information? This sort of diversity? And all without having to also wade through articles like "What is a query letter?" or "Beginning Basics of Point-Of-View."

Ninc is also devoted to promoting its members and their work. We've begun small, by beefing up The Next Page on the website – giving more information about member releases, including the nifty "live" graphics showcasing book covers. We're investigating forming our own Ninc Speakers Bureau. We're seriously looking at mass email promotions to booksellers. We've got the Ninc Blog – a huge selling tool available to members. We have links to member websites on our website.

And we're open to any and all suggestions for other ways to use Ninc to help our members promote their books and themselves, simply because they belong to Ninc. If you want to help knock ideas around, assist with things like forming the Speakers Bureau and/or the promotion to booksellers, again, that's [kcmi@aol.com](mailto:kcmi@aol.com)

What else have we got?

How about the Legal Fund?

How about the easy-payment plans for Ninc Goes Platinum, and the fantastic Ninc Does Forensics Day connected to the conference in Saint Louis?

How about those great Member Discounts, Member to Member Resources, Members Recommend areas on the website?

How about our partnership with Tekno Books?

The publishing world is changing; we're going through some scary times. But Ninc, even as it grows and evolves to meet member needs, remains the single constant in many of our lives for two decades. Ninc is there, it's solid, it understands ... and it's always ready to help.

Tell me what else you can get for twenty-two cents a day that could even come close to doing that!

On Page Two of every *Nink* are the words: Ninc has room to grow.

So tell your writer friends. Send them a copy of our brochure (see Page Two for how to do that). Every voice is welcome.

One of the things we all love best about Ninc is its diversity. We are writers of popular fiction. Not mystery writers, or romance writers, or horror writers, or science fiction or thriller writers, etc — we're writers, period. We bring so many different viewpoints to Ninc, even as we share our common concerns.

We don't have tiered memberships – the two-book author just starting out and the one hundred and two book author who has been knocking around since before the Great Flood are equal in Ninc. That's beautiful.

There are no fans, no aspiring authors, no contests.

The Ninc conference is laid-back and professional, start to finish. There's no reason to pack your best duds, or to hide out in your room for a while because the smile you need to wear for your fans is beginning to make your cheeks ache. You will never hear "Where do you get your ideas?" at a Ninc conference.

The Ninc conference is for learning, for sharing, for hanging loose but not hanging back. Ask anyone who attended the 2008 conference in New York how they felt on the way to the conference, and then how they felt on their way home again four days later.

Members went home hopeful, energized, ready, even eager, to get to work. The same will be true this fall, at Ninc Goes Platinum.

Ninc is the business of the business. It's also the heart of the writer. ▲

# Ninc.com Is Comprehensive Resource

Continued from page 1 ▶ And that's only what's available in the public area of the website!

Now it's time to sign in, with that process made easier with the inclusion of a *Forgot Your Password?* link. Type in your email address, click on the help bar, and your password will be sent to you.

In the **Members Only** area, you'll find that the Home page now greets you by name and contains your most recent membership information. There is also a frequently updated announcement area for important dates or messages.



Just One Thing — Be A Volunteer

Below that are colorful and convenient short-cut links to **updating your membership profile, volunteering, switching to e-Nink, referring a new member to Ninc** and, to assist on a wealth of subjects, the **How Do**

**I ...?** and **Who to Contact** pages.

If you don't know how to update your Profile, or any number of other questions you might have, check out "How Do I...?" If you want to contact, for instance, the website chair, "Who to Contact" lists names and email addresses.

Also, if you missed the previous month's edition of *Nink*, just click on 'Download a copy' and you'll have the electronic version to save or print. Keep an eye out, too, on the **What's New** section, just below the **Conference** advertisement, for other important announcements.

How Do I ... ?

There's a lot going on all over the Members Only Home page, with the overall goal being ease of use. See the tabs along the top of the page? The tabs are: Member Services, Conference, Committees, Insider Tips, Directories, Ninc Business, and Reference. Each opens to a world of interesting and helpful pages available only to Ninc members.

Come for a short tour to see what's on offer.



**The Legal Fund** - affords members who encounter legal issues pertaining to their careers (excluding contract negotiations) an opportunity to go over their situation with a legal professional, who will assess the problem and render advice.

**Member Discounts** - saves members some of their hard-earned income by arranging discounts on goods and services necessary to the writer. Examples: AuthorBuzz.com, Nielsen Bookscan, Office Depot, Office Max, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Romantic Times*, plus more.

**Join Ninclink Discussion Group** - join the absolute best e-mail loop with a single mouse click.

**Join Other Ninc Discussion Groups** - For now, these groups are NincCritique (critique and brainstorming) and NincHealth (Ninc's discussion list for health insurance questions for the self-employed.) Admit it, did most of you even know these two groups have been available for years? And a new group, NINC-YA, if not yet added, will be up on the website in the next few weeks.

**Nink Archives** - include issues (pdf) of *Nink* to download and read, covering the years from January 1994 through January 2009. Fifteen plus years of *Nink* excellence at your fingertips! Missing an issue? Find it here.

**Nink Index** - if you're looking for a particular subject in the *Nink* Archives, you no longer have to search through numerous issues to find it. The Index sorts them out for you by Title and Author on a variety of subjects: Computer, Internet, Marketing, Professional Issues, Publishing Business, Writing Craft, and Writing Life. And again, your article appears with a mouse click. Presently, the Index has been compiled from 1994 - 1998, with more to come.

**Ninc Logo** - proclaim your membership on your website and help promote Novelists, Inc. This page offers three designs in three sizes and three colors.

**Ninc Anthologies** - if you have questions about the collaborative relationship Ninc has with Tekno Books ▶



to produce and market anthologies collectively written by our members, this page should give you the answers. From how the relationship works, to the progress to date.

**Linda Kay West Memorial Fund** - this fund is used to cover the cost of yearly dues for members who otherwise could not afford to renew their membership, and is supported by voluntary contributions from members. Read about it here.

## CONFERENCE

**Conference:** Handy links to the 2009 *Conference Center*, *Conference Registration*, and a place to learn about or to relive some of Ninc's *Past Conferences*.

## COMMITTEES

**Committees:** Truly the heart of Ninc's success, the various committees get the job done. And they're all staffed by volunteers! Each committee has a page to explain its purpose, the Chairperson is identified (most have photos), the Committee Members are listed, and there's even an e-mail address if you would like to join them in their work. The committees are: 2009 Conference,

*Anthologies*, *Digital Rights Management*, *Discounts*, *Dues Renewal*, *Elections*, *Member Retention*, *Membership*, *Model Royalty Statements*, *Ninc Indexer*, *Nominating*, *Outreach*, *Volunteer Jobs List*, and *Website*.

## INSIDER TIPS

**Insider Tips:** *Member-to-Member Resources* - why go to strangers when Ninc members or members of their families can provide the writer-related services you need? *Ninc Members Recommend* - a catalog of goods and services your fellow Ninc members have used and believe you might want to try. *Industry Events* - a calendar of trade shows through the year, with links and dates.

*Dancing with Agents* - "Agents are like lovers. One person's dream is another person's nightmare." Tips and suggestions for when you want to Find a New Dance Partner or search for one for the very first time.

## DIRECTORIES

**Directories:** There are four Directories to locate fellow Ninc members. *Last Name/Pseudonym*, *Alphabetical List*, *E-mail*, and *Websites*. If their name isn't in one of these, they aren't in Ninc! This is where you'll also find a terrific *Agent Directory* and, still a relative newcomer, the *Literary Lawyer Directory*.

## NINC BUSINESS

**Ninc Business:** Do you want to know quickly who's on the *Board of Directors*? Want to know what they talk about at Board meetings--a Secretary actually writes down what they say and posts it in the *Board Minutes*! Then how about those *Accounting Reports*, and the *Bylaws*, and the

*Policies & Procedures Manual*. Not to mention the *Expense Reimbursement Form*. Oh, my! The *Committee/Chairperson List* is out there for anyone to see, as is the *Volunteer Jobs List*, and the answers to any questions a person might have about the *Authors Coalition*. And to top it off, there's a link to *Refer a New Member to Ninc* and to *Update Your Membership Profile*. Then a redux of the famous *How Do I ...?* and *Who to Contact* pages ... take a look. See if there's anything you want to ask; the answers are right there for you.

## REFERENCE

Finally, we have **Reference**, which is fast becoming one of the repeat go-to destinations on the website. Check out the informative links on the *Publishing Industry* page and the *Career* page (includes Promotion), the *Reference/Research* page (with the new General Guide to Search Preparation). *Hawkes' Historical Corner* (including Timelines, Free 19th Century

*Periodicals Online*, *Historical Slang Dictionaries*, *British Peerage Information*) and *Free Software* (from Mozilla Firefox to audio clips for your website) are also popular destinations for members.

And there you have it. As you can see, Ninc's Website Committee has worked hard to make Ninc.com a resource

that is not only packed with helpful information, but easy to use. But a tool is really only useful if it's picked up and given a workout. So please, do the web crew a favor—go to <http://ninc.com> and spend some time browsing the content. You may find answers to questions you didn't even know you had!

*By the time you read this Ginger Chambers, after two long years of extensive work on the committee, will no longer be Co-chair, Members Only. Instead, she can be found catching up on her writing career, her to-be-read pile, and/or sailing the ocean blue.*

## COBRA Now Costs Less

As mentioned in last month's cover story on Health Insurance, employees who leave a job that offered group health-insurance (whether they leave voluntarily or are laid off) are eligible to continue that group health insurance under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, or COBRA, for up to 18 months.

The big drawback to this is that COBRA coverage was often prohibitively expensive, as the former employee was responsible for paying 100% of the cost.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 includes changes to the health benefit provisions of COBRA that make this coverage more affordable. Beginning March 1, eligible former employees, enrolled in their employer's health plan at the time they lost their jobs, are required to pay only 35 percent of the cost of COBRA coverage. Employers must treat the 35 percent payment by eligible former employees as full payment, but the employers are entitled to a credit for the other 65 percent of the COBRA cost on their payroll tax return. (COBRA only applies to companies with 20 or more employees.)

### **Business Briefs**

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

**B&N Heading for e-Bookstore:** Barnes and Noble purchased Fictionwise for close to \$16 million plus incentives in performance over a two year period. This includes the Fictionwise.com and eReader.com web sites. There is still no comment on the opening of an eBookstore in the first quarter of 2009.

**Making Information Pay / Book Industry Study Group (BSIG):** BSIG will hold its sixth conference in early May in NYC. With *Shifting Sales Channels* as the overall theme, attendees will look at the new marketing outlets that are taking the place of traditional sales methods and how publishers can take advantage of the changes. A "share your thoughts" online survey about ways to change methods is being provided by BISG to all publishing houses employees.

**Non-Profit Crime:** After former Illinois Governor Blagojevich went to contract at six figures with Phoenix Books, a bill was introduced in the Illinois legislature that includes the language: "any elected official who is convicted of a felony or of a misdemeanor involving a violation of his or her official oath of office [is] to forfeit any monetary rights derived from any media depiction or detailing of the crime for which the person was convicted as a term of their sentence. The forfeiture lasts during the term of the sentence and any period of probation, parole or supervised release."

While supported by the Illinois law makers, opposition is growing in the name of First Amendment rights, with the Motion Picture Association of America taking the lead. Additional groups that have gone on record against the proposed bill are Media Coalition, AAP and the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression.



## Speaker Spotlight: Paul Guyot, In His Own Words

After attending the University of Arizona, Paul Guyot immediately put his education to use by going to work as a waiter. That was followed by stints as a liquor store clerk, shoe salesman, and driving that little golf ball-swallowing cart around at the local driving range. But after an unfortunate incident involving a snap hook and an occipital lobe, Paul was told, “You’ll never play golf in this town again.”

He then hitched a ride to Los Angeles with a band of misfits and circus freaks filming the epic motion picture, *Harley Davidson & the Marlboro Man*. As the personal stand-in for Don Johnson, Paul had hours upon hours to hone his writing skills while waiting for Don to come out of his trailer.

Awards, accolades, and women throwing lingerie toward the screen whenever his name appeared soon followed as Paul’s career as a television scribe took off. Paul has written for such epic television series as: *Level 9*—created by bestselling author Michael Connelly—where a bunch of socially disabled computer nerds battled cyber-crime... *how was that not a hit?* *Snoops*, an ABC show about female private eyes who tended to lick whipped cream off each other during Sweeps week (yes, this is true); and that mother of all crime shows, *Felicity*. Contrary to tabloid gossip, Paul is *not* the person who suggested Keri Russell cut all her hair off, though he was there when it happened, and was the first person to remark, “Hey, who’s the little French boy?”

But Paul Guyot was just getting started. He soon went on to write and produce the Emmy-winning drama *Judging Amy* for three seasons, and managed to survive being fired by the studio’s head of production after Paul and another writer pal commandeered a studio golf cart and drove it out onto the public streets to a coffee house two miles away. When you need a grande white mocha, you need a grande white mocha.

Now hiding out, er, living in St. Louis, Paul has become what his agents refer to as “That doughy white guy in flyover country.” Um, I mean he’s known as “the pilot guy” because since moving, he has created and executive-produced pilots for TNT, Showtime, Sony Pictures, Warner Brothers, and currently has a development deal with FOX (they know nothing of the golf cart incident). He is also the creator and executive producer of *Crimes Against Persons*, a pilot for the A&E network to be filmed in St. Louis. On the movie front, Paul is adapting the Miles Corwin nonfiction book *Homicide Special* for 20th Century Fox studios.





He's published short stories in numerous anthologies and his story *The Law and the Order* was chosen as one of the Notable Stories of 2006, and nominated for the Million Writers Award. Paul lost out to an old man's story about his dying goldfish. *You've got to know your audience, people!* His latest story (Paul's, not the old man's) "What a Wonderful World" is in the Michael Connelly-edited anthology *The Blue Religion* (Little, Brown, 2008).

Paul's personal writing philosophy can be summed up in three words: I'm a fraud! But it's the deception and manipulation of people in order to convince them he actually knows what he's doing that is the true art to writing. He rarely reads romance novels, though he considers himself a romantic. At least he did back in college when he answered to the nickname of *Sweet Chocolate Muldoon*. Actually, that was the name of a pimp Paul was accosted by in between college and that Don Johnson movie. The emotional scars still linger, and to this day Paul cannot enter a Godiva boutique without convulsing, and will scream like a horror movie teen if he sees anyone wearing a fuzzy purple hat.

As of 2009, Paul has decided to adopt the late Robert Goulet as his mentor, and is currently living his life by Mr. G's personal motto of "Check it out!" It's going so-so.

More prosaic information and semi-nude photos of Sebastian Cabot may be culled from his web site: <http://paulguyot.net>



If you've stopped laughing yet, here's a bit more on Paul.

*Publishers Weekly* termed his "What A Wonderful World" short story in the recent anthology *The Blue Religion: New Stories About Cops, Criminals, and the Chase* (edited by no less than Michael Connelly), "One of the volume's strongest selections." Not bad!

Please also know that Paul will be giving a rather intense ninety-minute workshop in Saint Louis for all of us who have ever entertained the notion of writing for television, seeing if our books have what it takes to make the transition to the movies or TV. Hands-on, and definitely a two-way exchange of ideas and concerns and ideas/concepts/writing samples, this is another of the many innovative workshops no career novelist wants to miss!

To check out short bios of some of our other fantastic speakers, like Dr. D.P. Lyle, Tami Hoag, Lou Aronica, Sharon Shinn, Peter Miller, Penny Sansevieri and others (and with updates and additions coming all the time!), go to <http://ninc.com/conferences/2009/speakers.asp>

Me, I'm off to find a fuzzy purple hat....

**Kasey Michaels**

## **Ninc Goes Platinum: Celebrating Twenty Years Of Excellence**

Drury Plaza Hotel, Saint Louis September 30 – October 4, 2009

Register Now:

<http://www.ninc.com/conferences/2009/index.asp>

**Twentieth Year Anniversary Pin  
Limited Edition, Available Only in St. Louis 2009  
A "Thank You" gift from Ninc. Wear it proudly!**



# Top 10 Writers' Medical Mistakes

By D. P. LYLE, MD

**The Quick Death:** No one dies instantly. Well, almost no one. Instant death can occur with heart attacks, strokes, extremely abnormal heart rhythms, and cyanide and other “metabolic” poisons. Cyanide and a few other chemicals prevent the body’s cells from using oxygen so death arrives in a hurry. But trauma, such as gunshot wounds (GSWs) and blows to the head, rarely cause sudden death. Yet, how often has a single shot felled a villain? Bang, and he drops dead. In order for that to occur, the bullet would need to severely damage the brain, the heart, or the cervical (neck) portion of the spinal cord. A shot to the chest or abdomen leads to a lot of screaming and moaning, but death comes from bleeding and that takes a while.

**The Pretty Death:** I call this the “Hollywood Death.” Calm, peaceful, and not a hair out of place. Blood? Almost never. The deceased is nicely dressed, lying in bed, make-up perfect, and with a slight flutter of the eyelids if you look closely. Real dead people are ugly. I don’t care what they looked like during life, in death they are pale, waxy, and gray. Their eyes do not flutter and they do not look relaxed and peaceful. They look dead.

**The Bleeding Dead:** Your detective arrives at a murder scene a half hour after the deed. Blood oozes from the corpse’s mouth and from the GSW in his chest. Tilt! Dead folks don’t bleed. You see, when you die, your heart stops and the blood no longer circulates and it clots. Stagnant or clotted blood does not move. It does not gush or ooze or gurgle or flow or trickle from the body.

**The Accurate Time of Death:** Determining the time of death is neither easy nor very accurate. It is always a best guess and is stated as a range and not an exact time. Yet, how many times have you seen the detective or the ME confidently announce that the victim died at “10:30 last night”? I always wonder exactly how he made this determination. Was it rigor mortis, body temperature, or lividity? Was it the presence of absence of certain bugs? Of course, the problem is that none of these is accurate. In real-life the ME would say that death *likely* occurred “between 8 p.m. and midnight.” But that might make him appear wishy-washy and Hollywood likes its heroes to be smart. Smarter than they could possibly be.

**The One-punch Knockout:** You’ve seen and read this a million times. The hero socks the bad guy’s henchman in the jaw. He goes down and is apparently written out of the script, since we never hear from him again. It’s always the henchman, because the antagonist, like most people, requires a few solid blows to go down. Think about a boxing match. Two guys who are trained to inflict damage and they have trouble knocking each other out. And when they do, the one on his back is up in a couple of minutes, claiming the other guy caught him with a lucky punch. Listen to me. Only James Bond can knock someone out with a single blow. And maybe Mike Tyson. Your car-salesman-turned-amateur-sleuth cannot.

**The Disappearing Black Eye:** If your character gets a black eye in Chapter 3, he will have it for two weeks, which will likely take you through the end of the book. He will not be “normal” in two days. A black eye is a contusion (bruise). It is caused by blood leaking from tiny blood vessels, which are injured by the blow. It takes the body about two weeks to clear all that out of the tissues. It will darken over two days, fade over four or five, turn greenish, brownish, and a sickly yellow before it disappears. On a good note, by about day seven, your female character may be able to hide it with make-up.

**The Quick Healing:** This is a corollary to the above. If your character falls down the stairs and injures his back, he will not be able to run from or chase the bad guy or make love to his new lover the next day. Give the guy a few days to heal and make him limp and complain in the interim. If he breaks an arm, he’ll need four weeks minimum.

**The Untraceable Poison:** No such thing. With fancy equipment like Gas Chromatography–Mass Spectroscopy (GS-MS) virtually any chemical can be identified. The combination of these two tests gives a “chemical fingerprint” of the compound in question. The trick is to disguise the death to look like something else so that an expensive and time-consuming full toxicological examination will not be done.

**The Instant Athlete:** Your PI drinks too much, smokes too much, and eats donuts on a regular basis. He will not be able to chase the villain for ten blocks. Two on a good day. If he must, then make him capable. Remember “Babe” Levy (Dustin Hoffman) in *Marathon Man*? He had to run for his life as Dr. Christian Szell (Sir Laurence Olivier) and his Nazi bad guys chased him endlessly. But earlier in the film we learned that he ran around the reservoir in Central Park every day. He *could* run for his life.

**The Instant Lab Result:** The world is not like *CSI*. They get results in a New York minute. In the real world the same test can take days, even weeks. A preliminary or presumptive test may be done quickly, but most confirmatory testing takes time. And the coroner will not likely release a report until the results are confirmed.

D. P. Lyle, MD is a special guest speaker for Ninc Goes Platinum in St. Louis this fall. He'll also be holding workshops you won't want to miss during the special day-long pre-conference Forensics Day. Make your reservations now. For more about Dr. Lyle, visit The Writers Medical and Forensics Lab <http://www.dplylemd.com>



## The Author

HAVING SENT HER NOVEL OFF TO THE EDITOR, AND HAVING CLEANED HERSELF UP, THE AUTHOR VENTURES INTO THE WORLD.



SO GOOD TO STRETCH MY LEGS. TO BREATHE FRESH AIR AGAIN.



# The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



## Agent Karma

*“My karma ran over your dogma..”*  
— Unknown

Back when I was an aspiring young romance writer, I researched and queried a dozen agents, all of whom rejected me. Half of them said my work wasn't marketable. The rest said the romance genre was dead and finished.

Within the year, Silhouette Books bought *both* of the two “unmarketable” novels with which I had queried those agents. And the romance genre, of course, has remained a major market force all these years.

Once I had my first book offer from Silhouette, a writer advised me to look for an agent again, because I shouldn't make a deal without one.

This is the dogma of our profession: A novelist must have an agent.

So I contacted an agent who was recommended to me.

The agent advised me to turn down the offer and forget all about writing for Silhouette. I should instead write some on-spec manuscripts in horror or glitz-and-glamour, because that's what was “hot.”

I had no interest in either of those genres (both of which, incidentally, took a commercial nosedive soon after I received this advice), and I certainly didn't want to turn down Silhouette's offer. So I made polite “thanks for your time” noises, got off the phone, and sold a number of category romance novels without representation for the next few years.

Then I reached a point where I wanted to develop my career beyond the Silhouette market. Conventional wisdom said that I must have an agent for this. So I again researched agents and sent out queries. This time, a number of the recipients were interested, now that I had already made eight book sales on my own.

I eventually hired someone with whom I'd had two excellent interviews, who expressed enthusiasm for my writing and my career potential, and who shared my interest in a long-term, career-building relationship.

This agent submitted my new proposal to five houses. They all rejected it. The agent immediately dumped me.

I sold another book to Silhouette on my own and wrote it while I tried to figure out how I had so badly miscalculated in choosing that agent.

Some time thereafter, an agent whom I knew (since I by now knew a lot of people) expressed interest in representing me upon learning that I was unagented. After several discussions, I became a client.

The agent sold a book to Silhouette, a house where I had already sold nine books. The contract terms and the money that the agent negotiated were identical to what I had been getting on my own there... except that now, I was only getting 85% of that money. The agent did, however, make my first-ever book deal outside of Silhouette, selling one of my rejected Silhouettes to one of that house's short-lived competitors. We made no other sales during our brief association, which I terminated because I was uncomfortable with the agent's volatility.

In response to my departure, the agent sent me a vitriolic letter (which I kept, in case legal action became unavoidable). And for the next year or so, the agent gossiped nastily about me; I heard about it first-hand from multiple people in the business.

Needless to say, the next time an agent heard I was unrepresented and asked me to consider becoming a client, I said no.

However, the agent persisted, and we had some good talks about my career and the agent's interest in it. Given the agent's excellent reputation and evident enthusiasm, I realized that I was being foolish in resisting. I decided I mustn't let a couple of previous mistakes and the resultant anxieties hold back my career now. So I became a client.

There were ways in which the ensuing business relationship was very fruitful and rewarding. There were also, how-

ever, ways in which it was very frustrating and stressful. Finally, I decided to leave. Although I appreciated the positive aspects of the association, the negative aspects were such that, in retrospect, I should have left sooner than I did.

I subsequently made five book sales with material in which that agent had not been interested. For the latter three sales, I decided to hire another agent to negotiate the deal, after I got an offer on the table.

I once again researched agents, and I hired one with an excellent reputation who seemed very enthusiastic. But the enthusiasm didn't last. I already felt more tolerated than valued by the time that same three-book publishing contract got cancelled after the first book was published and had weak sales. After that, my relationship with the agent so closely resembled that of a dinner guest whose host dons a bathrobe and starts yawning copiously, I decided it was time to go.

Firing an agent with whom one initially had high hopes of a long and positive association is no less disappointing than being dumped by the agent. And experiencing such disappointment four times in a row left me very discouraged about the whole concept of the agent-author relationship.

I by now suspected that I had bad Agent Karma.

Every agent whom I dealt with over the years had clients who credited the agent with being a key factor in their success and with standing by them through the ups-and-downs of the publishing business. They were all respected, and several were extremely successful. In every instance, there are writers for whom these people have been good agents—in some cases, stellar agents.

Just not for me.

And yet, I am a slow learner. So, as lamentably stupid as I now realize this was, I nonetheless tried once again to hire an agent.

No one whom I queried this time wanted to represent me or had a favorable opinion of the work that I sent to them. After a couple of months of this, I realized I needed a vacation from feeling belittled and dismissed by literary agents. So I ceased my queries and started submitting to publishers on my own. If I was going to get rejected, it might as well at least be by people who actually *buy* manuscripts.

Within weeks, I got a three-book offer from a major house, for slightly better money than I had been making before being dumped by a publisher and losing my fourth agent.

I realized I was right back where I had started my career—being told by multiple agents that my work was unsaleable... shortly before I sold it.

So I did some math and realized that I've made most of my book sales on my own. Additionally, if I had listened to the negative advice of numerous agents over the years, I would have earned considerably less money than I have actually earned.

Why have I had repeatedly negative experiences, even with agents who I have heard some writers describe as capable, or even as brilliant?

Because—yes, it's confirmed!—I have bad Agent Karma.

And surely the most sensible way to deal with it is to avoid agents. So I have abandoned the author-agent paradigm as a business model for my career.

I don't preach a philosophy whereby *no one* should work with agents. Indeed, there have been a few (albeit a very few) points in my own career where I clearly benefited from having an agent. But due to my cumulative experiences over time, I don't deal with agents anymore. Because I have decided to let my karma, rather than the industry's dogma, be my guide.

*Laura Resnick currently writes multiple fantasy series, short stories, this column, and a pesky master's thesis.*

## **Bylaws Changes Approved**

***Celebration is in order! The Bylaws amendments have passed. Many thanks to everyone who voted, and thank you to the board members (particularly Charlotte and Ruth) who worked very hard to get out the vote. Though Bylaws Reform is a boring topic that makes many people's eyes glaze over, it's vital to keep organizations like Ninc viable. Thanks to these updates, Ninc will be able to better serve its members. The amended bylaws will soon be available on <http://www.ninc.com>***



# Ninc Bulletin Board

COMPILED BY JACKIE KRAMER

Got any news or information  
for the Bulletin Board?

Send it to Jackie at  
jackiekramer7@netscape.com

What do you know about insurance? Co-pays? What do you pay for a PCP? What's the newest info on the upcoming Ninc conference? How can you use an editor to advance your career? If you were subscribed to Ninclink, you'd already have the answers. Sign up now!

To subscribe to Ninclink, send a blank email to:  
NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Just to let you know that we now have a NINC-YA loop available to Members who are writing or interested in writing for the YA market. It's a forum for sharing our knowledge, discussing what's going on in YA, sharing our progress and figuring out some answers. If you'd like to join, please Email:

NINC-YA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

I'll need to approve your membership (basically by checking that you're a NINC member.) Hope to see you at NINC-YA — Abby

It's time to update some of the website pages, and we'd love to add some more to the MEMBERS RECOMMEND page. Are there any website designers, printers, tools of the trade, or services you'd like to give a shout out to? If there are, please email me at sasha @sashawhite.net and let me know.

I'd like your name, the name and URL of the business or person you're recommending, (if it's a tool, like the NEO or a voice recorder, then a URL to an information page on it) and a quote. You can see check it all out here.

[http://www.ninc.com/members\\_only/insider\\_tips/members\\_recommend.asp](http://www.ninc.com/members_only/insider_tips/members_recommend.asp)

Example: Printing: Prinrunner

"I recently got bookmarks made by an online company called Prinrunner. I was pleased with the promptness, quality, and price compared to other places I've used." ~ Toni Herzog

Send your info to me, Sasha at:  
sasha@sashawhite.net

## NincBlog Ideas

Is there an industry guest you think would be interesting to the organization? Or to yourself? Send any suggestions to Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com — the name of the potential guest, position, company and email addy.

## Want to blog?

Join the Ninc authors and industry guests who are already doing so. Signing up is easy. Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NINCLINK/cal> and fill out your profile. Then send me a notice that you have done so at Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com. Don't mail the notice to the list, please. The webmistress will approve you as an author so that you can post to the blog. To sign up for a date, use the Yahoo calendar at the yahoo/Ninc website: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NINCLINK/cal>

Hopefully you have your yahoo ID and password. If not, you'll need to get them. Note that all the Wednesdays are already reserved for INDUSTRY GUESTS.

Sign up for M-Tu-Th-F first, then for weekends.

My call is for additional information for the Member-to-Member Resources page. This site is described as "a listing of writer-related businesses run by Ninc members or their immediate family."

Here's a link to the page; check it out:

[http://www.ninc.com/members\\_only/insider\\_tips/member\\_to\\_member.asp](http://www.ninc.com/members_only/insider_tips/member_to_member.asp)

So, is your brother a graphic designer? Does your mother design Web sites? Does your sister fix computers? Is your father a publicity manager? Help a member out and let us know.

If you're interested in promoting your services - or your immediate family member's services - that could benefit your Ninc family, please send me the following information:

Resource type:

Resource contact name:

Resource contact Web site:

Resource contact e-mail address:

Resource description: (25 word max, please)

Referring member, relationship: (remember, immediate family members only, please)

Please e-mail this information to me at Sargtaz@Yahoo.com. It would be very helpful if you could include "Member-to-Member Resources" in the subject heading, please. Drop me a line if you have any questions. — Patricia



## WRITING is TAXING

By Diane O'Brien Kelly

# Separate But Not Equal

Come tax time, married taxpayers have two options when choosing their filing status—married filing jointly or married filing separately. In most cases, filing jointly produces the least amount of tax. Occasionally, however, separate returns will yield a lower tax liability. Be aware, however, that tax laws do not apply equally to those filing jointly and separately.

Married taxpayers who file separately lose these tax benefits:

- ▶ Earned income credit,
- ▶ Educational credit such as the Hope and Lifetime Learning credits,
- ▶ Child care tax credit,
- ▶ Credit for the elderly and disabled,
- ▶ Interest deduction on student loans,
- ▶ Deduction for IRA contributions for a non-working spouse.

When filing separate returns, the spouses do not have the right to independently decide whether to take the standard deduction or itemize. Either both spouses must take the standard deduction or both must itemize. Separate returns eliminate the ability to offset one spouse's income with the other's losses. Also, married taxpayers who file separate returns may have to include a greater amount of their social security benefits in their taxable income. To add insult to injury, the deduction for IRA contributions for married separate filers begins to phase out where adjusted gross income (AGI) exceeds the measly amount of \$10,000. A final disadvantage of filing separate returns is that tax preparation fees are likely to be higher since two returns will be required rather than one.

But as we writers know, there are two sides to every story. In some cases, filing separately may be the better option.

Where one spouse has income considerably higher than the other and the lower earning spouse has a significant amount of itemized deductions, it may be best to file separately. If one spouse plays fast and loose with his or her taxes, the other spouse can avoid liability for their partner's tax sins by filing a separate return. Similarly, if one spouse owes back taxes, back child support or alimony, or has defaulted on a debt to the government such as a student loan, the other spouse can avoid having his or her refund seized to satisfy their partner's debt by filing a separate return. (Note, however, that the same effect may be achieved by filing Form 8379 "Injured Spouse Allocation" with a joint return). Similarly, taxpayers whose marriage is on the rocks may want to file separately to avoid being bound by potential tax issues after divorce.

Because deductible medical expenses are reduced by 7.5% of the taxpayer's AGI, filing separately may benefit a spouse with significant medical expenses by reducing AGI and thus allowing a greater medical expense deduction. Likewise, certain miscellaneous itemized deductions, such as unreimbursed employee business expenses and tax preparation fees, are subject to a 2% AGI floor. By reducing AGI, the deductible amount of these expenses can be increased.

If married taxpayers are separated, with one having a legal obligation for alimony or spousal support, separate returns must be filed in order for the taxpayer paying alimony to be entitled to deduct the payments made to the other spouse.

**Community Property States.** Taxpayers who do not live in community property states will report only their own wages and income on their married separate returns. For those living in community property states, the rules are different and are dependent on that state's laws. If you live in a community property state and your writing biz is a sole proprietorship, you will need to determine what portion of your income and expenses to report on your return and what portion your spouse must report. In Texas, for instance, earnings from a sole proprietorship are ▶

considered community income and divided down the middle, so one-half of each spouse's sole proprietorship earnings would be reported on each spouse's return.

The IRS allows those living in community property states to report only his or her own income if each spouse treats the income as if only he or she is entitled to the income and the spouses do not notify each other of the nature and amount of the income by the due date of the return, including extensions. In other words, if you live in a community property state and only want to report your income, don't ask, don't tell, and don't spend your spouse's income.

For more information on how community property laws might affect your taxes, see IRS Publication 555 "Community Property", at <http://irs.gov>.

**Not sure if you're married?** Uncle Sam considers a man and a woman to be married for tax purposes if the two are married at the end of the year. If you're married on December 31, you are considered married for the entire year. You are considered single if you are divorced by December 31, even if you endured the bonds of a holy—or unholy—matrimony for the majority of the tax year. The federal government does not recognize same-sex marriages, though some states recognize them for state tax purposes.

**What This Means To You.** If you've had a slow year in your writing business and incur a loss, it may be best to file jointly with your spouse so that your loss can offset your spouse's taxable income. Also, if you incurred educational expenses that could qualify for the Hope or Lifetime Learning Credit or the student loan interest deduction, you may be better off filing a joint return to take advantage of these tax benefits. Of course, educational expenses relating to your writing may be deductible as a business expense even if you file separately, but in most cases taking a credit will save more tax than a deduction. If you contribute to an IRA, you may be better off filing jointly in order to maximize your IRA deduction. If you file separate returns and live in a community property state, part of your net earnings from your writing business may be reportable on your spouse's return. ▲

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## ***Business Briefs***

**Anderson Debt Continues to Rise:** The amount of Anderson News' debt to publishers could hit \$200 million or more, with claims filed by Hachette, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster and Random House alone in excess of \$35 million. Anderson reports it has dealt with over 400 retailers, and now a request has gone in for an interim trustee. The total amount of what could be owed is being cited as a reason for the trustee, as well as the fact the liquidation notice from Newleaf Corp. did not include anything about Anderson's assets or liabilities. Publishers also want details on the sale of the portion of Pologix that Anderson owned in addition to assets from Anderson Services.

**Libel Tourism:** The Free Speech Protection Act was introduced in the House of Representatives in early March. The intent of the bill is to prohibit U.S. courts from acting on libel judgments in foreign courts against U.S. plaintiffs. U.S. authors and publishers could also counter-sue in cases where material has First Amendment protection.

This is similar to the Libel Terrorism Protection Act passed in New York State last year. It is also known as Rachel's Law after Dr. Rachel Ehrenfeld, author of *Funding Evil*. The book focused on Khalid Salim bin Mahfouz and his potential role as a terrorist funder for al-Qaeda and Hamas. Mahfouz went to court in the U.K and won; he also filed against close to 40 other U.S. publishers and authors. If the federal version passes, Ehrenfeld will reopen her case. ▲

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# The Resnick/Malzberg Dialogues

## Agents – Part 2

### Fees, Hollywood & Over-the-Hills

*Dialogues between award-winning science fiction and fantasy authors Mike Resnick and Barry Malsberg were originally published in the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Bulletin, and are reprinted here with the permission of Mr. Resnick and Mr. Malsberg. Each Dialogue features these pros discussing an issue of interest to working novelists. We hope you'll enjoy and profit by this eNink eXtra series.* **Ed.**

**Mike:** Now Barry, since you've spent 33 years, more or less, in a literary agency—and how you sold 90+ books and 300+ stories during just the first decade of that time remains a mystery to me—perhaps you'd care to tell us how different sales strategies are developed, and how they work? And you might even address fee reading.

**Barry:** “You might address fee reading,” the man says as an afterthought. Ever so shyly. “You might want to address those remarks on Jews we heard on the tape transcripts, Mr. President.” “Mr. President, one little question about that female intern.” Something like that. Talk about backing into the horned beast.

Anyway, and all right, let's address the issue of fee reading. As you and most of the membership know, the Scott Meredith Agency, since its inception, has offered to read the work of unpublished or unestablished writers for money, with the understanding that saleable work would be represented by the agency, potentially saleable work would be directed through revision by the agency, and that unsaleable work would—well, it would be kindly declined. Over very long periods of time—the Agency opened its doors on 6/29/46 and fee reading was always a constituent—the program has had its successes and its problems. Many prominent or not-so-prominent one-time clients of the agency originally came through the fee department, including several present SFWA members; I won't mention their names but will note that Richard S. Prather, John Farris, Bruce Douglas Reeves (who he?), Bill Pronzini, and Jeffrey M. Wallman are all important novelists who showed up at the beginning with \$25 or \$35 in hand, a hopeful expression, and a manuscript.

What's even more interesting than a list of fee-paying writers who became agency clients is a list of fee-paying writers who did *not* become clients—whose works were declined by the agency or unsuccessfully marketed. Here are just a few, and in no particular order: Stephen King, Evan S. Connell, Jr., Robert Parker, Raymond Carver, John Barth. The novel on which Gus von Sant's first screenplay and film were based was rejected by the agency. This all goes to prove something, although what that something might be is not entirely clear.

Another interesting list would be those who have worked for the fee department—writing responses in Scott Meredith's name. Here are a few (and again, in no particular order): myself. Donald E. Westlake. Lawrence Block. Lester del Rey. Lawrence M. Jannifer. Damon Knight. Allen Ginsberg. Donald A. Fine. Phil Klass (better known as “William Tenn”). Talk about the true unwritten history!

My own position on fee reading is that like almost everything else in this world—marriage, love, happiness, the effects of wealth or poverty—it's all contextual, it all depends. Depends upon the acuity of the person reading the manuscript, depends upon the ability or potential of the author. (Hopeless is ▶

almost always hopeless.) I've never endorsed the system, I've never condemned it. (Would be hypocrisy certainly to condemn.) There are better ways to get an agent and a publisher but unconnected writers have always had a problem with access and most publishers won't even screen unsolicited materials any more. So if you're out there in the provinces (and for an unpublished writer West 29th Street can be a province) you've got to try something.

At the least, most fee correspondence from at least this agency has been competent, lucid and to the point, and over the years the agency readers have passed on little work which has subsequently proven to be saleable. The record isn't terrific but it's probably been acceptable. I can't talk to the practices of any other agencies.

Sales strategies? "How are different sales strategies developed?" If it's Dean Koontz or Stephen King you don't need a sales strategy, you just need an open phone line. If it's a Mike Resnick at this point in his career you don't need much of a sales strategy either; the agent and the publishers have a pretty good assessment of the writer's audience, ability and potential and it's just a question of how much a publisher wants to risk and whether the publisher wants to try to change the equation. Sales strategy comes more into play in the case of a writer at the very beginning of a career or perhaps coming off a hot first book which has sold or been reviewed beyond all expectations and which makes possible a leap in advance and possibilities. But is the largest advance necessarily the best offer in its totality? Is the largest publisher the best publisher? These are questions which can only be answered on an *ad hoc* basis and I suppose that it is here—and here more than in any other area—where the differential abilities of the agents and their sympathy with the client can make a real difference.

I think, overall, the role of an agent is overrated. John Updike has never had one. Neither did John O'Hara. Nabokov had representation for some foreign language rights but, after he left Cornell to write full-time in 1958, had no agent for his manuscripts. Dean R. Koontz has had four agents, each of which did better for him than the last, but this was because Koontz was doing better and Agent #1 might have done as well for the present-day Koontz as is Agent #4. You or I could do pretty well for Stephen King, I suspect, while the William Morris Agency would have a hard time promoting ancillary and subsidiary rights to the work of Ray Cummings. No agent can be better than the work represented (some can be worse), no agent can as I've said find a new set of markets.

**Mike:** But tell me how and through whose efforts you've made your movie sales (did Eleanor Wood or a cooperating agent manage those as well?) and I will be content and fully informed.

**Barry:** My first couple of movie options came through a cooperating Hollywood-based agent. But, possibly because he represented literally hundreds of category writers, he never followed up on them. He seemed content to make option money and let it go at that, so finally I let *him* go.

Now, over the years, we saw one talented writer after another go out to Hollywood to conquer the movie world . . . and we saw one talented writer after another vanish from sight or wind up writing Saturday morning cartoon shows for television. We spent the better part of 25 years observing them and trying to learn from their mistakes, and when we thought we'd figured most of it out, we decided it was time to take a fling at Hollywood ourselves. (I say "we" because Carol, my wife and collaborator, is a far better and more visual screenwriter than I am. One of the things I discovered is that you have to chuck almost everything you learned as a prose writer before you can become even a mildly competent screenwriter, and since she





hadn't been writing prose professionally for a quarter of a century she had a lot less to unlearn.)

The first thing we realized was that you can't market a script the way you market a manuscript. Studio script departments are just enormous slush buildings.

The second thing was that the easiest way to sell a script was not to market it yourself—writers are pretty unimportant cogs in the movie machine—but to package it with a hot director and a hungry producer. (How you find them is another story, and has almost nothing to do with agents.)

The third thing was that this is a business of personal contact and cachet, far more than the prose writing business, and you use your contacts to make more contacts. In the past three years we've sold two screenplays and optioned seven books and two stories—and every single deal, every contact we've made, can all be traced back to the first producer and director who optioned *Santiago* years ago. They introduced us to their friends, who introduced us to *their* friends, and it became a geometric progression.

Now, one of the interesting things we learned along the way is that, unless you're planning to make Hollywood a full-time career, you don't actually need an agent.

That's right. Unlike literary agents, what Hollywood agents primarily do is put you together with people who might be interested in buying your services. They set up meetings. They arrange lunches. But once an offer is actually on the table, your Hollywood agent steps aside and your Hollywood *lawyer* takes over the negotiation—and Hollywood lawyers eat Hollywood agents for breakfast.

(Yeah, I know: you have a friend who sells screenplays and doesn't have a lawyer, just an agent. Right. But if that's the case, then his *agency* has one or more lawyers to handle the negotiations.)

Now, if you want full-time work, as I said, you want an agent. And full-time work entails getting rewrite jobs (80% of all the contract writing in Hollywood, maybe a little more, is rewriting). It entails hawking scripts that you've written on whim or on spec. It entails endless business lunches and meetings, and in most of them you'll know three minutes into them that you're not getting hired today.

Hollywood is so eccentric, so alien to Carol's and my values and lifestyle, that we're willing to give them only ten weeks a year. And since we've reached the point where they call us with offers at least once a year, frequently two and three times, we have more work that we can handle, and hence have never hired a Hollywood agent. (We *do* have Quentin Tarantino's lawyer. And no, we didn't just walk in off the street to get her. Again, it was a matter of contacts.)

Most prose writers look upon Hollywood with some contempt. It shows in their attitudes, and it shows in their writing, and that's why Hollywood is so loathe to hire prose writers. Screenwriting is a totally different discipline from prose writing, but it's every bit as demanding and precise, and until one masters the art—and you can't go into it saying, "Hell, what's so hard about writing *Porky's #8* or *Halloween #17*?"—I wouldn't advise anyone to quit their day job or back out of their book contracts . . . and if you're *not* going into it full-time, I also wouldn't advise getting a Hollywood agent.

Another thing to consider: Hollywood rewrites *everything*. There are a lot of reasons for this. One is that they're trying to create art by committee, and hence a lot of people have input into the script. Another is that sometimes scripts, like books, need revising. There are other reasons, dozens of them. But there are two primary reasons, neither of them known to the general public: first, it gives executives cover (if the movie flops, they can blame it on the half-dozen writers, whereas if they go with the first script, it's their fault for showing such poor judgment); and second, while most Hollywood execs are brilliant men in their fields, their fields are marketing and making deals, and since they do not know the intricacies of screenplay construction, all they can do is voice a vague dissatisfaction when a screenplay doesn't meet their ▶



expectations. They are not writers, and hence cannot tell a writer how to fix or change it; so they flit from one writer or writing team to another until finally someone intuits what they want and delivers it to them.

And since rewriting is part of the culture, what this means—and I've talked to a number of SFWAs who have experienced this—is that if you do get an agent, he'll almost certainly have you rewrite your treatment or your screenplay endlessly, *without pay*, until he thinks he can sell it. But he has no more knowledge about what will sell than you do; if he did, he'd have one of his better-paid and better-credentialed journeyman writers script it.

If, after all this, you still feel you *must* get a Hollywood agent, then there are two ways to go: you can join a major agency that handles actors, directors, writers, the whole nine yards. (The advantage is that such agencies often package entire movies, and you certainly have a better chance of selling your screenplay if Mel Gibson and Meg Ryan and Ivan Reitman are attached to it. The disadvantage is that such an agency probably has 50 or more writers who make more money than you, have been with the agency longer than you, and would also like to be packaged with the agency's Name actors and directors.) The other way is to join what is called a boutique agency, a small house dealing (in this case) exclusively with writers; your screenplay will be given more respect, more time, more attention—and will be far more difficult to sell since it won't come packaged with anything else.

The one other thing I can tell you about Hollywood agents and agencies is that they invariably try to steer their clients into television, where one makes smaller but far more regular paychecks. The loyalty of most agents is to their agencies first and their clients second—and their agencies need cash flow. The problem is that there is a very definite social and economic ladder in Hollywood, and movies are at the top of it; if you write enough television, you'll be tagged as someone who couldn't make it in movies, and you'll have a much harder time getting off the small screen and onto the big one. Now, if you're Joe Straczynski you're making zillions and doing just what you want and you needn't give a damn about that, but most people aren't Joe Straczynski, and it bears mentioning.

Why do we put up with it? Because once you get your foot in the door, you'll find that your check for each draft of your screenplay dwarfs anything you ever saw from your novels.

In sum, this is an incredibly idiosyncratic field. Everything I've said is true, based on our experience—but if there's a successful SFWA screenwriter whose experience is diametrically opposed to ours, I wouldn't be surprised.

**Mike:** So much for what I know about Hollywood. Now, very briefly, how do you know when a literary agent is about to become a major force in the field, and how do you know when a literary agent is over the hill?

**Barry:** Well, that's another of those questions. "How long should a novel be? How much money is good money for a novel? What defines a 'professional writing career'?"

But addressing this one I think of the collected sayings of the sainted or soon-to-be-sainted Yogi Berra discussing a restaurant: "It's become too popular. No one goes there anymore."

Thus with agents. By the time an agent acquires a reputation as a hot, talked-about, promising agent-on-the-rise who has done some really good things on behalf of writers at a relatively early career stage, well, it's already too late. At least for similarly unestablished writers. The agent has made deals, found larger quarters, been besieged by potential clients, has hired or expanded a staff and has focused her attention on the present client list. You might be able to sign on but it's already too late, at least for an unestablished writer.



Unless you're a real acquisition for the agent, you're going to be passed onto a new assistant or sloughed off altogether.

In sum, it is the same problem with agents as with, say, romance novels . . . by the time the word gets out to the provinces that romances are what is selling now, by the time you read it in *Writer's Digest* or even *Publishers Weekly*, publishers are stocked five years ahead. You can't follow a trend, you have to be a trend, at least if you're trying to get something started outside of New York, away from fast access,

And, not so ironically (because it can be powerfully damaging to those caught in the trap) the signs of an agent or agency in decline are very similar to those of a "hot agent" addressed a little too late . . . disdain, assistants, long gaps in response, a clear inattentiveness, a willingness to take a lower offer for the work of an unestablished writer "because it's not important enough" (or, the other face of the syndrome, an unwillingness to even represent work not seen as "breakthrough" or "crossover" or "major market"). If your agent won't return or have someone return your phone calls within two days, or if your editor or an editor you query says that she has not been able to connect with the agent . . . these are, as they say, signs that you've got a problem.

Not all agents are on the rise or in decline, of course; there are many who have been at a stable and reliable level of function for a long time and will continue to be. But it's a business no less volatile than publishing, and I can think of four agents or agencies, very important 10-20 years ago, which are obliterated or might as well be. No substitute for vigilance, and ultimately the career of a writer is in her own hands. An agent can't take that responsibility and shouldn't be asked. Depend first and last on your own resources; anything beyond that is a blessing.

Unestablished writers tend to overvalue the role of agents the way high school students overvalue the role of sex in a relationship. Important, yes; to die for, yes—but ancillary, Mike, and the earlier this is understood, the better.

**Mike:** The only thing I can add to that is that it's harder to pinpoint an agent's tastes than you think. Virginia Kidd, for example, handles Gene Wolfe, Anne McCaffrey, Alan Dean Foster, and the estate of James Tiptree, Jr. It would be hard to find four more different writers. Which does she prefer? I've no idea, and since she's an ethical agent, I'm sure she'll never tell you.

Ralph Vicinanza handles James Patrick Kelly, Julian May, Jerry Pournelle, and Connie Willis. Again, what does that tell you about his taste? Zip.

So I suggest that when selecting an agent, you don't try to determine what he or she likes, because that's really not very important (beyond the fact that they don't out-and-out loathe your work). Look at their accomplishments, and if their accomplishments meet with your approval, the rest will take care of itself.

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