

# NINK

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## Retirement Plans for Writers

BY JENNY ROUGH

After reading the last page, I closed *The Golden Willow* and held it to my chest. I love Harry Bernstein's writing. Other than a novel that never received much attention, Bernstein didn't publish his next book, *The Invisible Wall*, until he was 96. *The Dream* followed at 97 and *Willow* at 98. Now, he's 99 and working on another book.

I turned 36 this summer, and when I blew out my candles, I wished to still be writing 63 years from now. I have no intention of 'checking out' of my career when I hit retirement age.

Even so, I opened a Solo 401(k) for my freelance writing business. "A lot of self-employed people think they'll never retire, but you need a safety net in case a health issue arises or something happens and you can no longer do what you love," said Jeremy Vohwinkle, a Michigan-based retirement counselor who blogs for About.com and GenXFinance.com.

Recently, I talked with Vohwinkle and other financial advisors about retirement options for freelance writers. Here's a roundup:

### BASIC PLANS

• **Traditional IRA:** A Traditional IRA is open to any freelance writer who has earned income. In 2009, you can contribute up to \$5000 (\$6000 if age 50 or older). The money squirreled away is not taxed upfront, but will be taxed in retirement. Meaning, you can deduct your IRA contribution from your income taxes, but the contribution, plus any growth, will be taxed when you pull the money out.

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• **Roth IRA:** A Roth IRA is similar to a Traditional IRA (same contribution amounts) except the tax break comes later. Meaning, you'll pay tax on the amount you contribute, but when you pull the money out in retirement, you won't pay taxes, not even on growth. You can only contribute to a Roth IRA if your income falls within a certain range. If filing as a single, your eligibility begins phasing-out when your modified adjusted gross income hits \$105,000 (\$166,000 if married, filing jointly).

### SPECIALTY PLANS

• **SEP-IRA:** Next to a basic IRA, a SEP-IRA it's the easiest option to set up. The benefit of a SEP-IRA is that you can contribute more money than you can with the basic plans. In 2009, as a sole proprietor, you

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## **Novelists, Inc.**

FOUNDED IN 1989

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Address changes may be made on the  
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For members without Internet access,  
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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

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or email [HollyJacobs1@aol.com](mailto:HollyJacobs1@aol.com)

### **New Applicants:**

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### **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.

## ***And Now For The Nagging Portion of Our Program... and some Suntan Oil***

**KASEY MICHAELS, PRESIDENT 2009**

Yes, it's that time again — dues notices for 2010 are on their way to your mailbox. You can also pay your dues online at <http://www.ninc.com>, but either way, Renewal Season officially begins November 15.

The good news is, dues have not been raised. In fact, dues haven't been raised in a lot of years. Now, what other bill, professional or otherwise, can you think of that hasn't been bumped, jumped, inflated, pushed, or otherwise targeted at more of what's in your wallet, hmm?

So we're pretty proud of that one — that we've managed to keep expenses down while at the same time increasing Member Services. This is because we're thoughtful, prudent, inventive, caring ... and because we all pay dues, so we're looking out for Number One at the same time we're looking out for the other six hundred of us. Hadn't thought of that one, had you?

Seriously...we hope Ninc has done enough for you in 2009 to merit keeping us around for another year. We even hope you won't keep shuffling the renewal notice to the bottom of the pile until suddenly it's January 15 and you panic, knowing you're about to lose the best professional organization in the industry.

So when that envelope comes in the mail — quick, before you forget, fill out the form, plus the Authors Coalition form, and write that check. Or go online and use a credit card or Paypal to re-up for another great year of Ninc.

And, speaking of another great year of Ninc, if you missed *Ninc Goes Platinum* in Saint Louis (and, boy aren't you sorry if you did!), we've got another fabulous conference ready to go in October of 2010.

*Brainstorming on the Beach* is slated for October 6–9 at the fantastic TradeWinds Island Resort at Saint Pete's Beach, Florida. We're talking temperatures in the sunny 80s. We're talking fourteen or so restaurants on the premises. We're talking a resort hotel/spa just steps from the white sands and blue waters of the Gulf. Check it out: <http://www.tradewindsresort.com/>

I mean, the TradeWinds Island Grand Beach, a AAA “four-diamond” resort, will be our own 20-acre paradise, where we can walk miles of beautiful white beaches, sip drinks (with little paper umbrellas in them, no less) at the beach bars, swim in any of the five heated pools (well, four; one is reserved just for kids), relax in one of the whirlpool spas, feed the swans and ducks who wander the grounds — even paddle your own paddleboat through the “meandering waterway” of this truly excellent property.

We're also talking room rates of \$129 a night (yes, that's \$129 a night — not a misprint!), repeating the split-payments program that worked so well this year, the convenience of Tampa Airport just miles away, and “shoulder dates” built in so that you can, if you wish, bring along the spouse, the kids, extend your stay, and write it all off (I love those words: write it all off).

No, 2010 will not be a repeat of the fairly intense 2009, with a special “extra” day program or three workshops an hour. First of all, it would be difficult to find volunteers crazy enough to put in over a year of pretty darn intense work to pull off a repeat of *Ninc Goes Platinum*. 2010 will be a more laid-back atmosphere, with built-in free time to meet and mingle, because we need balance, diversity, and *Brainstorming On The Beach* is going to give us just that. Think Ninclink — live.

But as Marcia Evanick moves from Conference Registrar to Ninc Treasurer, and I hand the President's gavel to Kay Hooper (good luck with that one, Kay — nobody ever gave me a gavel), feelings of

euphoria brought on by all the nice things members had to say about 2009 found Karen Tintori Katz and Leslie LaFoy somehow agreeing to stick around for one more conference committee headed up by (yes, I know I'm insane), *moi*. So three of the Musketeers will be back for *Brainstorming on the Beach*, with Marcia hanging around to keep us on the straight and narrow.

We've got the date, we've got the hotel, we've got the wild ideas for a Really Different Sort of Conference. We know 2009 was the success it was because of all the Just One Thing volunteers who pulled together to make it all happen — and we know all your email addresses.

So mark your calendars now, for the first Ninc conference devoted to brainstorming, learning new ways to waken our imaginations and boost our creativity, forge new friendships and even brainstorming communities with our peers ... all while we wiggle our toes in the sand and work on our suntans!

Unless, of course, you lose your renewal form on your desk ...



## Retirement Plans for Writers

*Continued from page 1* ▶ can contribute up to 20% of your net adjusted business earnings, or \$49,000 (whichever is less). Unlike other plans, there is no catch-up contribution if you're age 50 or older.

- **SIMPLE-IRA:** In 2009, you can contribute \$11,500 (\$14,000 if age 50 or older). Your company can match up to 3% of your income (as a sole proprietor you're considered both an employee and employer — enabling you to make your own contributions as well as matching ones).

- **Solo 401(k):** “The Solo 401(k) is the grand-poobah of retirement plans for small business owners because although it has the same cap as a SEP-IRA, you can contribute more at a lower income level,” said Jim Joseph of Financial Services Advisory in Rockville, Maryland. Only available to small business owners with no employees (unless the employee is your spouse), in 2009, sole proprietors can contribute \$16,500 plus 20% of net adjusted business earnings, or up to \$49,000 (whichever is less). If you're age 50 or over, the maximum contribution is \$54,500. A Solo 401(k) can be slightly more complicated because you might have to file an annual form with the IRS.

Many factors such as marital status, steadiness of income, or how your business is structured may trigger different rules. Also, if you have employees, you may have to fund their plan depending on which option you choose, so keep that in mind if you intend to hire help.

More sage advice? Mike Van Horn, a small business advisor in California, has three final tips for freelance writers: 1. Don't quit your day job 2. Move back in with Mom and Dad 3. Put away 5%–10% off the top of every check you receive.

*Jenny Rough is a lawyer-turned-writer and has written articles and essays for The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Self, Yoga Journal, and Writer's Digest, among other publications. She blogs about books for LIME.com and her work has appeared as commentaries on public radio.*

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### Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

#### The Shape of Things to Come

Hewlett Packard has beaten Apple by launching their *DreamScreen* tablet computer in October. DreamScreen allows users to log into Facebook, look at photos, and listen to music streams on a 10.2" (\$249) or 13.3" (\$299) screen. While Apple's highly secret device will not be seen before February, Microsoft has its *Courier* ready to present. Courier has a two-column, booklike appearance, is multi-touch and has a camera on the back cover, but no price has been listed yet. With Internet connections these devices should be able to download html or pdf formats for ebooks.

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## ***The ABCs of Forensics***

**With Eileen Dreyer, RN, playing Dr. D. P. Lyle**

No, his body wasn't stuffed in the wall someplace. No, he wasn't kidnapped by crazed authors who wanted to pick his brain for hours on end. The truth? Dr. Lyle missed the Ninc conference because he was sick. But he was generous enough to send along his notes for the ABCs of Forensics so the intrepid Eileen Dreyer could present his lecture instead.

There were a few technical glitches at the beginning, but Eileen filled the time well, with a list of "Things the Pros Hate." You know, all those cringe-worthy mistakes made on TV shows and in books that real CSI and medical people know would never happen in real life:

Testing substances to see what they are (e.g., sticking a finger in the bag of white powder and tasting it to see if it's cocaine).

Someone from the lab interrogating a witness. Lab techs choose to work in the lab because they like being there. And the cops don't want the white coats doing their job.

Fingerprint matches that come back immediately. For one, Eileen said, the fingerprint database isn't nationwide; it's a state-by-state thing. And you'd get back a grouping of many likely matches, which requires an expert's analysis to narrow all that down to the closest match.

Detectives doing the lab's work and vice versa. The cops don't go running DNA tests. Nor do they tell the lab what to do. The lab looks at the evidence and decides what tests to run because they're the ones who know the limitations of both the evidence and the testing equipment.

Not knowing enough about firearms. Giving the wrong caliber, or adding a safety to a Glock, or any of other numerous firearm mistakes, can jerk the reader out of the story.

Detectives who knock off at five o'clock. Law Enforcement officers—federal and local—work unpredictable hours because crime doesn't just happen between eight and five.

Skeletal remains that have been buried for decades, yet emerge ghost-white and perfectly intact. This tidbit had Eileen telling us some really interesting facts about how the front two teeth are the first to fall out, and can often get buried deep in the ground if the victim is sitting up when he died and falls face-forward. Made me want to floss right then and there.

No backlogs. All cops have backlogs of cases that keep them busy.

Evidence gathered without observance of the rules of evidence, or outside the limits of the search warrant. Most search warrants are very specific. If the computer isn't listed on the warrant, your character can't just start clicking through the files. ▶



**Ninc's Founders Recognized.** [from left] Maggie Osborne, Janice Young Brooks, Kasey Michaels, Jasmine Cresswell, Leslie LaFoy, Marianne Shock





**One of Ninc's birthday cakes** — we had two!

For resources, Eileen mentioned the “Crime Lab Project,” which is supported by authors who want to see additional funding for crime labs everywhere. Very few labs have the cool space-age TV CSI technology, nor are the techs running around in Hummers to investigate crime scenes. Most are underfunded, understaffed and under-technology. <http://www.crimelabproject.com/whatis.html>

She also mentioned the Citizens Police Academy. Most local police departments run one, which allows any citizen to learn all about the inner workings of the police department. However, the FBI also runs one, and if you are recommended by an agent or by someone who has already taken the class, you can sign on up. She also mentioned some great forensics classes taught right there in St. Louis.

By this time, our own technology issues were solved, and Eileen ran Dr. Lyle's PowerPoint. She started by explain-

ing the difference between the two types of Forensic Science. Biological (forensic pathology, forensic anthropology, forensic odontology, forensic entomology, forensic psychiatry, serology, toxicology and botany) and Physical (trace evidence, firearms examination, document examination and fingerprint examination).

She mentioned Locard's Exchange Principle, which is the basic tenet of forensics— put simply, if two objects meet, they must leave something of themselves behind. She went through evidence classifications, the importance of knowing jurisdiction, and an informative segment on identifying skeletal remains.

We covered the advances in DNA since 9-11, a variety of techniques to estimate time and cause of death, and several methods of exposing latent fingerprints. She also gave us information on rape investigations, supplementing Dr. Lyle's information with first-hand info from her days as a nurse. We finished with a section on toxicology analysis, with a reminder that labs only test for opiates, stimulants and alcohol. Anything else (like strychnine) would only be tested if suspicions are raised by the investigators.

It was a great workshop, and Eileen's own experiences in the emergency room, as well as those as an author, made it highly informative. She did an outstanding job taking Dr. Lyle's place, and giving us a nice thorough overview of the fascinating field of forensics.

**-- Shirley Jump**

**Seen on-scene at Ninc's dinner.**  
Laura Phillips, Laura Hayden, Lou Aronica





## What's So Different About YA?

**Presented by Sharon Shinn, Julie Kenner, Diana Peterfreund and Shirley Jump**

This informative discussion covered some of the basics about YA. Sharon Shinn presented some tenets that used to hold true for YA, but may not hold true anymore. The consensus seemed to be that these days, rules are being broken everyday in YA.

The protagonist in a Young Adult novel is usually under 18. Whatever the age, the characters in YA are operating without adult supervision. The protagonist is in transition. He may be on the cusp of adulthood or dealing with first love, the first time on her own, or some other first.

YA is published in all formats — trade paper, mass market paper and hardcover. Since the library and school market is such a huge part of the YA business, more books are published in hardcover.

Contemporary YA novels tend to be shorter —70,000 words or less. Fantasy YA can be longer (much longer as evidenced by the Harry Potter books.) Requirements vary by imprint. In general, when writing YA you have to be efficient. These readers like action and fast-paced stories.

Don't talk down or preach. As Julie Kenner said "Kids have really good bullshit meters." She recommended an informative article from *Publisher's Weekly* by Max Leone "read this b4 u publish" at [http://www.publishersweekly.com/yout=talkbackCommentsFull&talk\\_back\\_header\\_id=6567063&articleid=CA6612603](http://www.publishersweekly.com/yout=talkbackCommentsFull&talk_back_header_id=6567063&articleid=CA6612603) or <http://tinyurl.com/atgkv8>

Sex in YA novels ranges from nonexistent to offscreen, to on-screen, but not graphic.

Problem novels and paranormal series are really big in YA.

As far as the publishing side of YA goes, there are many viable publishers you may never have heard of. There's a longer lead time from the time your book is bought to when it shows up on the shelf, and generally more involved editorial.

After the book comes out, you may see more interaction with your readers online, and your books will have a longer shelf life.

Some useful resources: Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators <http://www.scbwi.org>

Verla Kay Blue Boards

<http://www.verlakay.com/boards/index.php>

TeenLit Authors at Yahoo Groups

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/teenlitaauthors/join>

— Cindi Myers



Elizabeth Moon and Elaine Isaak visit between workshops



# Conf Recap

## ***E-Publishing...Is It for Me?***

In this session, former Samhain editor Angela James spoke candidly about the e-publishing industry.

James began with reasons why traditionally published authors might want to submit to an e-publisher. Some might want to enter the field for additional income. Some, who write quickly, might be looking for more publication outlets. And some might see e-publishing as a way to increase their release schedule to keep new work available to readers.

She cited two authors who had been traditionally published and turned to e-publishing for a particular project. One is Lucy Monroe, who wanted to publish an inspirational. Since she'd published some very sexy historicals, traditional inspirational houses were reluctant to buy her. The other was Deidre Knight, who couldn't convince traditional publishers to take a chance on a book where the hero was previously in a homosexual relationship.

James pointed out that digital publishing was around for ten years before 2002, when Ellora's Cave began offering something new and intriguing that women couldn't find other places. With the EC erotic romances and erotica, digital publishing exploded.

To date, erotic romance has been the best-seller in the digital field. (with erotic romance selling better than erotica because readers still want the Happily Ever After) But some publishers, notably Samhain, are successfully selling books with both erotic and non-erotic content. Still, an author might make thousands of dollars for an erotic romance and only hundreds for one without erotic content.

How many copies is an e-publisher likely to sell of any title? The answer is anywhere from two books to thirty thousand copies. The publishers with the highest sales are the ones you've heard of, such as Samhain, Loose Id, Liquid Silver and Ellora's Cave. Some of these publishers also sell print copies of their titles.

James sees big gaps in sales among the top sellers, the midlist, and the bottom. But she adds that the beauty of small press publishing is that you can publish a book and not worry about the sell-through. According to James, the "backlist is god in e-publishing." Authors with a backlist usually see a bump in their sales when a new release comes out.

The business model is different in e-publishing than in traditional publishing. It's "profit sharing," like selling for Avon or Mary Kay.

About 55 percent of all digital book sales are through third parties—such as Fictionwise, Sony, and Kindle. All of these take a huge cut. Amazon gets 65 percent of the cover price for selling the book. The author typically gets 35 percent. Most e-publishing editors also work on a royalty basis—usually five percent. Which doesn't leave much for the publisher.

One member of the audience asked why a top-selling author can't get an advance.

James answered that the digital publishing culture is different from the print publishing culture. The comment was reinforced by Deb Werksman, an editor from Sourcebook, who said, "If you expect an advance, then don't expect a 30 or 40 percent royalty rate."

What's the future of e-publishing? James said that digital publishing currently represents one to two percent of the marketplace. But she expects that to shift, and thinks that within the next five years digital publishing will account for twenty-five percent of all book sales.

— Ruth Glick





# Conf Recap

## Scott Manning Offers Optimism about Publishing

*Scott Manning, of Scott Manning and Associates, was the featured speaker at Novelist Inc.'s 20th Anniversary Celebration at the Ninc Goes Platinum Conference in St. Louis. Scott has more than 25 years experience in book publishing and shared his entertaining and insightful perspective with us all. He was kind enough to allow Nink to reprint the talk he gave. Warning: this talk does contain frank language, so if certain swear words offend you, feel free to skip this. – Ed.*

**BY SCOTT MANNING**

I'm worried.

I'm worried that newspapers are dying left and right and there will be no one left to write about my books and authors.

I'm worried that I'm not spending enough time on Facebook—and all kinds of important stuff is passing me by—important stuff like the long-lost high school friend who's telling me that she's enjoying a grilled cheese sandwich—yummy!

I'm worried that I've got 100 followers on Twitter and I'm not saying anything. God, according to a profile in the *New Yorker*, even Nora Roberts is tweeting. How does that woman have time? I was exhausted just reading the article.

I'm worried that a bunch of you are tweeting about me right now and saying horrible things in less than 140 characters. "Scott Manning doesn't tweet. What an idiot. Check him out <http://www.scottmanningpr.com>"



**Scott Manning**

Actually, I'm not worried at all. A lot of my colleagues in publishing are running around and saying, "The Sky is Falling, The Sky is Falling!" Every time another print book review bites the dust, they sob into the sleeves of their tweed jackets with visions of returns dancing in their heads.

But as a self-proclaimed media junkie, I find what's going on in the media terribly interesting. I liken it to the introduction of mass market paperbacks. At the time, everyone said it was going to mean the end of hardcovers. Hardly. I've been in publishing for 30 years, and ever since I walked in the door of my first job at Lippincott & Crowell, I've heard rumors of the death of publishing lurking in every corner. And here we are. Hardcovers didn't die—everything just shifted around, market shares changed, and there was room for everyone.

I think and hope that the same will be true of content delivery on the Internet. Sure, the print and broadcast outlets that I'm used to working with are suffering. But I don't think they're going away. It's all just going to shift—and keep shifting.



# Conference Recap

I was heartened by a column that Maureen Dowd wrote a couple of years ago. She attended a bloggers convention in Las Vegas. Everyone was running around saying “Death to old media.” But they all wanted book deals.

In fact, just a couple weeks ago the director of the Harvard University Library agreed with me. John Darnton— who many of you may also know as a *NY Times* reporter and bestselling author of both fiction and nonfiction, had this to say in *Publishers Weekly*:

*“History shows us that one medium does not necessarily displace another—at least not in the short run. Manuscript publishing flourished long after Gutenberg’s invention; newspapers did not wipe out the printed book; the radio did not replace the newspaper; television did not destroy the radio; and the Internet did not make viewers abandon their television sets. Every age has been an age of information, each in its own way.”*

But all of this change gives us a chance to look back at how we’ve done things in the past—and how we’re going to move forward. And, it will give me the opportunity to tell you how I spent Valentine’s Day 1994 with Jeffrey Dahmer.

Anyway, I miss the author tour, don’t you? Or, as my author PJ O’Rourke calls it, “the author tour death march.”

What wasn’t to love about landing in a new city every morning, getting scooped up by a chirpy media escort and whisked off to morning zoo radio where those crazy wacky guys could make fun of your book without having read it—and, if you were lucky, make an appearance on the local morning TV Show.

Remember local morning TV? In Cleveland, for instance, I had the choice of *three* TV outlets for my authors: *Morning Exchange*, *AM Cleveland*, and taping an interview with the legendary Dorothy Fuldheim.

One time the producer from *AM Cleveland* showed up in my office in New York with frosted hair, bright red nails and a fun fur. In a nasally voice she said, “I want sex, soaps and STARS!”

“Well, I’ve got Allen Ginsberg,” I said.

There’d be a couple of print interviews—yes, a couple—a bookstore appearance and several radio shows. And you could always do what I did once—and send an author to the transmission tower in the middle of nowhere rather than the station.

Now, not to dump on Cleveland—but I have to tell you a story about Dorothy Fuldheim. In her heyday, she was an intrepid reporter in a male dominated profession. But by the time I got into book publicity, she was a 90-year-old flaming redhead who interviewed authors on the noon news.

I was touring Prince Michael of Greece, who was flaunting his royalty as the author of the novel *Sultana*. I came up with the line they actually used in a full page ad in the *NY Times Book Review*: “The Harem: first it was her prison...then her home... and finally, her domain.”

Anyway, he’s in Cleveland. Imagine touring a novelist in Cleveland today!!? He sits down with Ms. Fuldheim, the tape starts rolling, and she says “So, Mr. Sultana, tell me about your book, Prince Michael of Greece.”

But then he was in New York and it got better. How many of you remember Virginia Graham? I remember her as the host of *Girl Talk* when I was a kid—she used to interview people like Gypsy Rose Lee and talk about girdles. In her later years, she did a gossip segment on the local precursor to what is now *Regis and Kelly*. I walked into the green room where she was holding court. She took one look at my regal author and said, “Who are you and what do you do?” Ever the dutiful publicist, I introduced him and she said, “You’re a PRINCE? The only royalty I’ve ever met is my hairdresser, he’s a QUEEN.”



Seen on scene: Lou Aronica

Another woman in the green room piped up: “You’re a prince, you’re a real live prince? When I tell my hairdresser—he’s Greek—he’ll die, he’ll just die!”

I miss Virginia. And I miss shows like *Donahue* where you’d have male strippers on one day to boost the ratings, and a serious discussion about nuclear proliferation the next.

One time I had a weight loss spokesperson on, and the show turned into a circus. The producer and I still laugh about her having to tell the stage manager, “OK, Phil will be wheeled on in an herbal wrap.....Then there’s a cooking demo...Then you go to the Weight Watchers spokesperson—and oh, by the way, she’s deaf.”

And in those days, the show aired live in Chicago and videotapes were flown to New York to be aired the next day. My weight loss circus didn’t hold a candle, though, to the appearance I worked on by Eddie Fisher

I was the lucky publicist for Eddie’s FIRST memoir, with the what-were-they-thinking title: *Eddie: My Life, My Loves*.

We had booked Eddie on *Donahue*—and despite the fact that we warned the producers that Eddie’s mind was slightly cloudy from drug abuse—they insisted on doing not ONE but TWO shows with him. Of course, we couldn’t watch it as it was happening. We could only get updates over the phone during the commercial breaks.

We started hearing that he was answering every question “yes”.....“no”.....or “read the book.” Phil apparently was sweating bullets.

When he’d had enough, he finally looked Eddie in the eye and said “So, you’re off drugs?”

“Yes”

“You’re sure about that?”

“Yes”

“Didn’t take a little something before you came on the show this morning?”

When Eddie came back to New York, I got a taste of it myself. I asked him to sign a book for me. And since he never seemed to know my name despite the fact I’d been working with him for months, in my best publicist/ diplomat fashion—I said,

“That’s Scott with two T’s by the way.”

He looked at me quizzically.

I never read what an author has written until I’m safely away from them. I opened the book, and he affectionately wrote:

“To Scott—with two c’s.”

Coincidentally, in New York last night, I saw his daughter Carrie Fisher’s one woman show, *Wishful Drinking*. At 81, apparently Eddie hasn’t changed. He recently mistook his hearing aids for pills and swallowed them—and when someone asked him for help, he said “You ask me how far I can run, and I’ll say, ‘how high?’”

A few years ago, I had another author who thought he was a celebrity. I’ll call him Edward. Hands down, the worst author I’ve ever worked with. He had been a producer with a major news organization and thought he knew everyone and everything—so of course he had to go over the lists of every single person to whom I sent books:

“What about William Goldstein at the *New York Times*?” he asked imperiously.

“Oh, you mean *Billy*?” I replied.

Edward was on tour in Chicago, and the media escort called me to check in. I said, “So Bill, how is Edward doing?”

“Well he’s a little high strung today.”

To which I replied, “*Today!!*?”

Bill said, “Oh good—we can talk. We got to the parking garage at a radio station, and Edward couldn’t



Seen on scene: Catherine Coulter



# Conference Recap

wait for the elevator—so he started running up the ramp that's for cars only. At that instant, the bar that goes up and down to allow cars in and out came crashing down, hit him in the head and knocked his glasses off and broke them."

We were convulsed with laughter.

But the moral of the story is—be good to your publicist because we wield immense power, we're not afraid to use it—and we *never* forget. A few years later, we were still using clipping services. Remember those? Any time one of our authors or the title of their book was mentioned, we'd get the newspaper clipping. Well, it seems that Edward had been involved with the police in his hometown in an undercover mission to entrap prostitutes. And why was he doing this? Because he had solicited them himself, and copped a plea.

Gee, I wonder how a copy of that article found its way to every person who lay in the wake of his author tour????

So now we've basically said sayonara to author tours—they're too expensive, local media has dried up—and we got so crazy overbooking author appearances that they became a yawn, even in Peoria.

And then, of course, there are less-than-attractive fans. While we were walking into a bookstore appearance, a very funny bestselling author warned me "Get ready—I have the homeliest fans in the world." She walked into the room, and sure enough they fit the bill. The author couldn't take it any more, sat down at the table in the front and in her best southern belle accent said "O c'mon girls, purty up!

And I'll lament the demise of one last remnant of traditional book promotion. Remember when *Dateline* did more than catch predators? Well, come to think of it, maybe I'm somewhat responsible—because I gave them the biggest predator of them all.

That's how I wound up in a maximum security prison in the middle of Wisconsin on Valentine's Day 1994. I had spent six months painstakingly constructing a positive spin campaign for the memoir, *A Father's Story*, by the father of Jeffrey Dahmer. It culminated in an hour-long *Dateline* devoted to the book, including an interview with my author....and his infamous son.

So I set off for Wisconsin with Stone Phillips, his producer and crew—and spent about an hour inside a place that I never in a million years thought I would find myself. It was amazing—but I think the most striking part of it was hearing how matter-of-fact he was in talking about what he had done.

Well, so much for the glory days of traditional media. As I said, I'm worried. How am I ever going to have experiences again like this when my world is reduced to 140 characters like "I'm eating a grilled cheese sandwich, yummy!" I'm with George Clooney, who was just quoted as saying "I'd rather have a rectal examination on live TV by a fellow with cold hands than have a Facebook page."

As I said at the beginning, my contention is that traditional media (I refuse to call it "old" media) is not totally down for the count. Show me a "new" media campaign that's sold a lot of books—and I'll show you a more effective one that made use of new media, but used traditional media as a cornerstone.

Let me give you an example: I worked on a memoir by a father who, along with his wife, adopted a 6-year-old with autism. Totally written off as mentally retarded, they eventually turned him into an honor student. Plus, the author teaches writing at Grinnell and produced an absolutely gorgeously written book.

He wrote an extremely moving father's day op-ed piece that I placed in a major newspaper. Now keep in mind that parents of children with autism are unusually active on the Internet, constantly searching for any information that might help them understand their children. So it was easy to find web sites and bloggers passionate about the topic. Once we made them aware of the op-ed piece, they started chattering about it like mad, became our biggest endorsers—they told two friends, and so on, and so on....And that's



**Seen on scene:** Margaret Marbury accepted Ninc's congratulations on Harlequin's 60th Anniversary.



the beauty of new media. We can jumpstart a conversation about our books—often using traditional media like broadcast or print, and the discussion can then take on a life of its own on blogs, on Twitter and on Facebook.

I used to co-teach a publicity course at NYU with a great colleague of mine, and she'd always tell the students that a good publicist never puts their head down on the pillow at night feeling that they've done everything they possibly can for their books. And it's never been truer.

I was working with the writer Lily Burana. To make a long story short, she's a former punk rock, feminist stripper from the East Village who wrote an acclaimed memoir called *Strip City*. She then married an Army officer, and talked about the ups and downs of military life—for both spouses—in her follow-up memoir, *I Love a Man in Uniform*. Military wives really loved it, because she was a prime example of the fact that they're not Stepford wives—they're just as diverse as the rest of us.

One week before her scheduled appearance at the West Point Bookstore, she was abruptly cancelled. It had been enthusiastically arranged by Army wives on staff at the bookstore, and the cancellation came from the male officer in charge. While the devastated woman on the other end of the phone was apologizing profusely to me, I, the shameless publicist, was mouthing, "Thank you, God"—knowing that Lily and I were about to attend a conference of military bloggers. I placed a story about the cancellation in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*—and the bloggers ran with it.

But I'll end with a story about one of my favorite authors with whom I've just finished working. Richie Farrell grew up on the streets of Lowell, Massachusetts. He was born disabled, but his Irish Catholic father decreed that no son of his was going to be a cripple. So he essentially tortured Richie into becoming a high school football star. But then Richie got injured and began to abuse pain killers... which led to heroin.

So he wrote a gritty memoir called *What's Left of Us* about going through court-ordered detox. The first night he shot heroin, he went to visit his mother in the hospital after she'd had a hysterectomy. He went home to tell his father that Mom was OK, and found the old man on the kitchen floor, *in flagrante delicto* with a neighbor. The father saw Richie...had a heart attack....and Richie let him die.

So you can just imagine the piece-of-work-author I'm dealing with. As we say in New England, Richie is "wicked awesome." He's an award-winning journalist, an amazing writer, and he cannot complete a sentence without using the word "fuck."

So how high a tolerance do you have for the word fuck? Read on, if you dare.

Anyway, we planned the fact that Richie would be in Hollywood on Father's Day trying to sell the film rights to his memoir. He wrote an incredibly edgy father's day op-ed—and I got it in the *LA Times* just as he was in the middle of meeting with studios, trying to make a movie deal.

He left me a message on my voice mail, literally as he was opening the Sunday paper and seeing his op-ed on the front page of the opinion section. (Imagine the following uttered with a wicked Boston accent)

"Oh my God Scott. Fuckin' A! This is fuckin' unbelievable. It's fuckin' amazing. It's the whole fuckin' front page. And they've got this fuckin' illustration that just blows you away. I've been working on this book for ten fuckin' years and I just can't fuckin' believe it." I think he had tears streaming down his face by this point.

So of course we went on to use that piece to start chatter in new media outlets, and it led to us getting Richie featured on *This American Life* and *Morning Edition*. And he's now in the process of working on two competing movie offers.

So take that Twitter—take that Facebook. It was a NEWSPAPER story that fuckin' blew my author away.

Thank you. ▲



**Seen on scene:** Conference participants check out the mock crime scene at Forensics Day.

## Forensic Files

By D. P. Lyle, MD



## Strangulation Information

### Q: How long does it take for someone to die if their carotid artery is compressed?

A: The two carotid arteries lie in the front of the neck on either side of the trachea (windpipe) and carry blood from the heart to the brain. They supply 90 percent or so of the brain's blood, with the rest coming from two small vertebral arteries that travel along the spine and over the back-most portion of the brain. The carotids are interconnected in the brain so that in a normal individual compressing a single carotid artery will have little effect. Compressing both can cause a loss of consciousness in 15 to 20 seconds and death in two to four minutes.

One general rule in medicine is that if the heart stops, the victim will lose consciousness in about four seconds if standing, eight if sitting, and 12 if lying down. This simply reflects the effects of gravity on blood flow. These numbers would also mostly hold true if both carotids were suddenly pressed shut—not easy to do—see below. But, to the brain, the complete interruption of blood flow through carotids would look the same as it would if the heart had stopped. Either way, the brain would receive no blood supply. And the brain needs a continuous supply of blood to function and survive.

Another medical truism is that dizziness, loss of consciousness, and sudden death are simply gradations along the same scale. That is, what makes you dizzy can make you lose consciousness, and what makes you lose consciousness can cause death. One of the things that can do this is compression of the carotid arteries. Brief compression, can cause dizziness, longer compression can cause loss of consciousness, and even a longer period of compression can cause death.

Another variable is how severely the arteries are compressed. If only partially collapsed, the victim might have no problems. Severe and almost complete compression can cause loss of consciousness and death in short order. And anywhere in between. Significant and potentially deadly compression can result from strangulation—either manual or ligature, hanging, or an aggressively applied choke hold.

So, depending upon the nature, force, and duration of the compression, your victim could have no symptoms, become dizzy, lose consciousness, or die. Or could progressively move from one of these to the next. The time required for death could be a couple of minutes or many minutes if the compression is less severe or intermittent. As the victim struggled, he could intermittently release the choke hold and this would prolong the ordeal.

All these variables mean that you can have it almost anyway you want. The killer could overpower the victim, render him unconscious in 20 seconds, and kill him in two minutes. Or the struggle could go on for many, many minutes. It's up to you.

D. P. Lyle, MD

Website: <http://www.dplylemd.com/>

BLOG: <http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com/>

## Business Briefs

### Who can endorse what according to the Federal Trade Commission . . .

<http://jetreidliterary.blogspot.com/2009/10/bought-and-paid-for-yessirreee-bubba.html> from "Pati Nagle" on Ninclink

### Giveaway more to sell less?

A panel discussion in September on free vs. paid content at New York University's Center for Publishing had some interesting points. The panel members were John Sargent, Macmillan; Gary Hoenig, ESPN Publishing; and Alan Murray, *Wall Street Journal*, and was moderated by Chris Anderson from *Wired*. Anderson observed that traditional paradigms have been switched in the digital market. So now you give away 90% to secure premium services to 10%. As a book publisher, Sargent contended that books were different from newspapers and magazines and faced different issues, citing author advances and other administrative costs contributing to the traditional publishers' problems in competing with web based companies.

### Short Attention Span Theater comes to Publishing from iMinds

iMinds has prepared eight-minute audiobooks, called Mind Tracks, that provide abbreviated presentations on a range of subjects. There are now 72 MindTracks available from Audible and iTunes and hundreds are planned by this time next year, in the U.S., Canada, U.K. and Australia. The cost is 99¢ each or discounted in groups (six for \$3.99, a dozen at \$5.99, etc.). There are 12 general categories and among the early titles are *Epidemics*, *D-Day Invasion*, *Film Noir*, *Stockholm Syndrome*, and *Evolution*







## **WRITING is TAXING**

**By Diane O'Brien Kelly**

# **Leaving Your Legacy**

When writers close the book on their lives, they leave a creative legacy behind. Writers may be able to leave a financial legacy, too, assuming they don't reduce their advances to \$300-a-jar sheep spleen skin cream.

Generally, heirs pay no income tax when they inherit property because, in most cases, the property represents income that was already taxed earlier when received by the decedent. However, certain types of inherited property will result in income tax to the recipient - what we tax nerds call "income in respect of a decedent." One such type of property is an IRA account. Because amounts remaining in an IRA on the decedent's death have not yet been taxed as income to the decedent, the burden of paying the income tax falls on the heir. Although this sounds like a bummer, the good news is that tax was deferred on the income, which is always a plus. (Note: because amounts contributed to a Roth IRA were taxed to the decedent, Roth IRAs do not generate "income in respect of a decedent" and are inherited without tax consequences to the recipient.)

If the funds held in an IRA are distributed in a lump sum and the amount is substantial, the recipient may pay lots of income tax because portions of the distribution will fall into higher tax brackets. Fortunately, tax law allows persons who inherit an IRA to set up what's known as an "Inherited IRA," a "Stretch IRA", or a "Beneficiary IRA." Although the heir will be required to take at least a minimum distribution from the Beneficiary IRA account each year, the amount of the required minimum distribution will be determined using the heir's life expectancy. This means the distributions can be withdrawn — and taxed — over an extended period of time. The younger the beneficiary, the greater the potential tax savings because the distributions and related tax can be stretched over a longer period.

Let's look at an example, because, after all, isn't it fun to do math? Let's assume a 50-year old beneficiary with \$25,000.00 in other taxable income receives a \$100,000.00 lump-sum distribution from an inherited IRA. Let's also assume the beneficiary is single, having divorced her husband after finding a red lace thong under the seat of his pickup. Under 2009 tax rates, portions of the IRA distribution will fall into the 15%, 25%, and 28% tax rate brackets. The taxpayer will pay \$28,720.00 in tax, which includes tax of \$3,332.50 on her salary, plus \$25,387.50 on the IRA distribution.

But what if the recipient has no immediate need for all the funds? She can reduce income taxes by instead transferring the inherited IRA funds directly into a Beneficiary IRA. Let's expand on the example above. Per the tax rules and applicable life expectancy tables, our 50-year old beneficiary would be expected to live another 33.3 years and may extend the required minimum distributions over that period. If she did so, she'd withdraw approximately \$3,030.00 from the IRA each year. The distributions would fall in the 15% tax bracket. She'd owe \$454.50 in tax each year, for a total of \$14,998.50 in tax over the 33-year term. Thus, spreading the distributions out cuts her tax bill by \$10,839.00 (\$25,387.50 – \$14,998.50).

Tax savings can be generated over shorter periods, too. For instance, if the heir puts the \$100,000.00 inherited IRA funds in a Beneficiary IRA and takes distributions of \$20,000.00 a year over five years, she'll pay tax of \$7,437.50 each year. Of this tax, \$4,105.00 represents tax on the \$20,000.00 annual IRA distribution. Thus, she'll pay a total of \$20,525.00 in tax on the IRA funds over the five-year period. *Voila*, she's still saved tax of \$5,312.50 (\$25,837.50 – \$20,525.00) over taking a lump-sum distribution.

These examples assume tax rates will remain constant. For simplicity's sake, the examples also assume her IRA has no earnings (not such a crazy assumption given today's financial markets).



If you've been socking away the maximum in your SEP-IRA account, you'll be in a good position to leave a financial legacy. Not only will you reduce income taxes, but you'll leave funds that can enjoy tax-deferred growth long after your death. Such a considerate corpse you are.

### **Caveats and Miscellany:**

You must designate the beneficiary in documentation with the IRA custodian for the heir to qualify as a "designated beneficiary" entitled to take advantage of these rules.

An IRA may be left to multiple beneficiaries, but unless the beneficiaries split the IRA into separate accounts by December 31 of the year after the accountholder's death, the life expectancy of the oldest beneficiary will be used for calculating required minimum distributions. It's best to deposit the funds into separate Beneficiary IRAs ASAP to achieve the longest deferral.

Leaving an IRA first to a younger surviving spouse who will then leave the IRA to beneficiaries can stretch the tax deferral out even longer.

The beauty of these accounts is the flexibility. Should the beneficiary need more funds, the beneficiary can take more than the required minimum distribution in a given year. On the flipside, the beneficiary must remember to take the required minimum distributions or suffer a steep penalty. If the beneficiary forgets, visit them in ghost form and give them a swift kick in the rear for wasting your hard-earned money.

The case for Stretch IRAs is often overstated. If the accountholder regularly withdraws more than the required minimum distributions, or lives long enough that the IRA account has only a small balance on death, the savings to the beneficiary from forming a Stretch IRA may be nominal. The tax savings may also be minimal if the beneficiary withdraws the funds over a very short period of time.

Not all financial institutions will set up these types of IRAs, so the funds may have to be moved in a direct trustee-to-trustee transfer to another institution. Check with your institution and/or review your custodial agreement to see if your trustee allows beneficiary IRAs.

The beneficiary cannot make contributions to, nor can funds from other IRAs be rolled into, a Beneficiary IRA.

Tax laws and rates may change, making this option less attractive. Inflation can also cut into returns.

And, as always, the assets in the IRA may fluctuate in value due to the market.

*Got a tax question for Diane? Email her at [Diane@dianeobrienkelly.com](mailto:Diane@dianeobrienkelly.com). Your question might be addressed in an upcoming issue. For further tax tips, check out the "Tax Tidbits" page on Diane's website, <http://www.dianeobrienkelly.com>.*

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## ***Business Briefs***

### **New Business Models**

The Frankfurt Book Fair conducted a survey on the impact of digitization on book publishing. Almost 72% of the publishers contributing to the survey cited new business models, new multimedia products and effective marketing strategies as the biggest hurdles in the change to digital. 840 publishers responded to the survey, but there was no specific agreement on a course of action. One quarter seems to favor a subscription model especially from the Europeans, and another quarter, favored by the U.K. and U.S., went with a micropayment idea. A premium model with payment for selected content had less than 20% support from survey respondents.

Pricing ebooks had a mixed response with most respondents favoring selling ebooks for less than the print price, though 19% wanted ebooks priced the same as print or more. Ironically 30% wanted ebooks to be at a 30% discount below print. Almost two-thirds of the publishers projected that digital products would be less than 10% of 2009's overall revenue, with 58% projecting over 10% in 2011. Almost half the publishers who responded to the survey thought that by 2018 more of their revenue would be digital than print. Almost 75% of the responses came from Europe.

# ***The Mad Scribbler***

**By Laura Resnick**



# **On Shoveling**

***“The most essential gift for a good writer is  
a built-in shock-proof shit-detector.”***

**— Ernest Hemingway**

One Christmas when I was about four years old, my parents asked me what I wanted Santa to bring me. I said I wanted a yellow plastic shovel with a red handle. My folks were perplexed, not only by the specificity of this description, but also by the fervency of their daughter’s desire for... a shovel. However, since it was an affordable item and the only thing I wanted, they were very cooperative.

I subsequently treasured my shovel, played with it often, and kept it for years. And although, decades later, that particular memento of my life is long gone, I still own shovels and still like them—because I like to get rid of crap that’s in my way, whether it’s snow, gravel, dirt, mud, elephant dung... or just plain bullshit.

But I recently decided that, when it comes to the usual piles of myths, misconceptions, and misinformation about writing professionally, I’m so tired of shoveling the same old crap time and time again, I’m through with it. I’ve been at it for years, my back hurts, and I’m done now. So if people want to be professional writers, they can get their own damn shovels.

The final straw for my weary back was seeing a blogger in the *San Francisco Chronicle* online giving advice about writing professionally. This individual says he prefers to write his books on a no-advance basis for a print-on-demand publisher, rather than for advance-paying major houses—which is his right, certainly. Unfortunately, he’s also exercising a more dubious right, which is to offer terrible advice to aspiring writers.

His August, 27, 2009, *Chronicle* blog is full of statements such as, for example: “An advance is a chance to ruin your career.” And: “If you accept charity [an advance] from your publisher, you don’t believe in your book.” Here’s my personal favorite: “It’s far more economically astute to borrow your advance from a credit card... than to accept an advance from a big New York publisher.” And so on.

Since some people might actually believe such advice, I considered writing a reply post on this blog explaining why the author’s claims are erroneous and how the information he presents about the publishing business is both incomplete and distorted.

But then a thought that’s been developing in my mind during the past year burst into full bloom, thanks to encountering lots of rich fertilizer like this lately. I thought: “If some people choose willful ignorance, then why should I break my back trying to shovel a path through the crap for them?”

Although there is currently, as always, a lot of egregiously bad (as well as unethical and very expensive) misinformation available about writing professionally, there is also an astounding quantity of really good information out there. There is much *more* good information available now than there was twenty—or even ten—years ago, and it’s much, much more accessible now than it was back then.

I discovered this several years ago when I first set up the Writers Resource Page of my website—a page that I

established because I was so tired of answering the exact same questions (and correcting the exact same misconceptions) about this business over and over. So I decided to create a one-stop-shopping answer that I could use on all occasions: “Go to the Writers Resource Page on my website. Everything you need is there.”

And that webpage has become an excellent collection of links to websites, workshops, books, blogs, services, organizations, and articles that all contain really good information about our craft and our profession.

Does someone want to know how a legitimate literary agent functions and how to hunt for one? This page recommends educational books by reputable agents and books by successful authors writing about the profession; it also has many links to relevant websites, blogs, articles, services, and advocacy groups. Does someone want writing craft advice? The page lists many craft books recommended by professional novelists, as well as websites where professional writers talk about their craft; it also contains many links to online and in-person workshops that are, again, all recommended by working writers.

The page links to blogs explaining what the most common publishing scams are, what “genres” are, how manuscripts get discovered in slush piles, how to submit a book, how to research a market, how to make time for your writing when you’ve got a day job and children, how to format a manuscript, what kind of money writers make, how to market your articles, where to send your short stories, how to get the most out of conferences, where your teenage offspring can get good writing advice and opportunities, and where to send your manuscript if you want a serious critique from a reputable freelance editor.

And I’m barely scratching the surface of the good information that’s available via this page.

Moreover, the page has so *much* information because good information about these subjects is so easy to find that I keep stumbling across it by chance and adding it, updating this page nearly every month with *still* more valuable resources.

And I have by now decided that if some (many?) aspiring writers are not seeking out and learning from the good information that’s readily available, and if they are not able to distinguish between good information and a blog which insists that living on your credit cards is better than earning an advance for your work from a major publisher... Then they do not have the built-in shock-proof shit detector which Hemingway accurately said that every writer needs. Without the ability to tell the difference between gold and manure, at least after a few attempts, a person simply hasn’t got what it takes to be a novelist—because this is one of the most competitive and unforgiving professions in our society.

I have met smart, self-educated, resourceful aspiring writers (some of whom subsequently made enough professional sales to become members of Ninc). Yes, they’re rare. But they do exist—just as good novels by new writers do get pulled out of the slush piles every year.

So I have decided that the previously mentioned *Chronicle* blog evinces an ethos that, upon reflection, I don’t think warrants me getting out my shovel on behalf of others anymore. I make a lot of good information available through my website, as well as through my writing and in my public appearances. I offer plenty to anyone who’s actively seeking good information and who can, at least after a few tries, distinguish between good information and bad. This is as much effort on behalf of clearing the Writer’s Way of sludge and elephant dung as my aching back can withstand... and I believe it’s enough.

You can find the Writer’s Resource Page by going to <http://www.LauraResnick.com>.

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## ***Business Briefs***

### **Dear Mr. President**

The Copyright Alliance is planning to deliver letters to President Obama and Vice President Biden, asking them to encourage policies that support the rights of artists, including authors. Over 7,000 electronic signatures have been collected so far. The letter is available at <http://www.copyrightalliance.org/letter>.

### **Kindle beyond the US**

Kindle hit the world market in October, priced at \$279 in over 100 countries while the price in the U.S. dropped to \$259. The overseas market has access to 200,000 English language books, 150,000 titles less than the U.S. offering. Random House is the only major publisher still in negotiations with Amazon.

# Ninc Bulletin Board

COMPILED BY JACKIE KRAMER

**Got any news or information  
for the Bulletin Board?**

Send it to Jackie at  
[jackiekramer7@netscape.com](mailto:jackiekramer7@netscape.com)

## Just One Thing Volunteer for Website:

We need someone to edit the Member Appearances page once a month. Contact Pati Nagle, [nagle904@patinagle.com](mailto:nagle904@patinagle.com).

## Renewal Season Begins 11/15.

**Watch for your  
renewal forms  
in your  
mailbox and  
online.**

## Earn a fast \$25!

If you can get a publishing pro (agent, editor, art director, etc.) to write a blog post, and you format, upload, and schedule the post, Ninc will pay you \$25. Plus you'll get credit for the blog post, which will drive traffic to your website. What a deal! Contact Patricia Rosemoor, [Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com](mailto:Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com).

## The Ninc Blog needs you.

- ▶ if you haven't signed up to blog this month or next, do so
- ▶ if you haven't contacted your editor or agent or publicist or webmistress about blogging as an industry guest, PLEASE do so and then let me know who is willing
- ▶ if you want to earn a modest stipend and get extra exposure via your pix and bio, think about being an industry guest contributor — invite a guest, have that person send you the posting, including graphics, post to the blog and you'll get extra visibility in addition to \$25 — let me know if you're interested
- ▶ if you Tweet or have Facebook, please tell your followers when YOU blog; additionally, help promote industry guests — just check the Ninclink calendar to see who is blogging next on Wednesday; include a link to the Ninc blog — <http://ninc.com/blog/index.php>
- ▶ include the link, and if possible, coming guests, on your webpage

Questions? Suggestions? Contact me — [Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com](mailto:Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com)

## Ninc Anthology Project

The Ninc Anthology project continues to make progress behind the scenes. Ninc members contributed enough nonfiction that Denise Little at TeknoBooks was able to assemble two non-fiction anthologies. She's now marketing them, though the current economic climate has slowed this down a bit.

Meanwhile, work is proceeding for several fiction anthologies by Ninc members. Denise has come up with the themes for these projects: *Lost Treasures*. *Antique Gold* will be edited by Mary Jo Putney, *Hot Gold* by Patricia Rice, and *Phantom Gold* by Kay Hooper. Invitations to participate in these anthologies are going out now.

To subscribe to Ninclink, send a blank email to:  
[NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

## Only You

Just a reminder: only you can update your member info on the Ninc database. Not the Ninc publisher or the editor. When your email addy or other info changes, please update the database so Ninc and your fellow members can keep in touch.

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P.O. Box 2037  
Manhattan KS 66505



# ***THE RESNICK/MALZBERG DIALOGUES***

## ***Adapting to Film: Part I***

**Mike:** When the American Film Institute released its list of the Top 100 Films, I, being a compulsive listmaker, made a list of my own Top 100. I was not surprised to see that the American Film Institute and I had only 26 films in common. What *did* surprise me was that I had only two science fiction films on my list, neither of them in the top 75.

So I started looking to see if I had any fantasy films at all, since I prefer writing and reading science fiction to fantasy—and I was amazed at the number and quality of fantasy films I'd listed: *Harvey*, *Field of Dreams*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Fantasia*, a couple that could be fantasy depending on your definition—*They Might Be Giants* and *All That Jazz*—and even *All That Money Can Buy*, a film version of “The Devil and Daniel Webster.”

I found that I loved Ray Bradbury's fantasy films—*Something Wicked This Way Comes* and *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*—and found *Fahrenheit 451*, the science fiction film based on his novel, to be boring and pretentious.

So I had to ask myself: there's no failure of imagination here, not with so many outstanding fantasy movies . . . so why can't they make good science fiction movies?

There was a time when the answer was easy: the special effects were so poor that an audience couldn't suspend its disbelief. But in this day of *The Matrix* and whatever Industrial Light and Magic can create, that's no longer valid.

But no matter how much praise you heap on a science fiction movie, it just doesn't stand up under the kind of scrutiny you'd give a mystery or mainstream film.

You want an example? Take *Blade Runner* (and someone please explain the title, since I never saw a blade or a runner in the whole damned movie). Great future Los Angeles; it really put you there. Nice enough acting jobs, even if Harrison Ford was a little wooden. Wonderful sets, costumes, effects.

But it's *dumb*. Why in the world is Harrison Ford risking his life to hunt down some androids that are going to expire in two weeks anyway?

How about *E.T.*, the highest-grossing movie of all time until it was passed by a couple of even dumber ones. Everyone loves *ET*. Well, everyone but me, anyway. Again, consider the spaceship-sized holes in the plot:

1. If E.T. can fly and/or teleport, why didn't he do so and reach his ship before it left him behind? (Answer: because this is what James Blish calls an idiot plot. In other words, if everyone doesn't act like an idiot, the story's over in three minutes.)

2. What mother of teenagers walks through a kitchen strewn with empty beer bottles and never notices them?

3. Why is a divorced working woman living in an \$800,000 home in one of the better L.A. suburbs? Granting that Elberg is a multi-billionaire, couldn't he have gotten one of his research people to find out how real people live?

#### 4. Why does E.T. die?

### 5. Why does E.T. un-die?

6. When E.T. finally calls home, wouldn't you think there'd be some kind of power surge somewhere in the area? I mean, his call is overtaking a ship that's traveling at light speeds.

And these are examples of the *good* science fiction films.

So why can't the movie industry produce a *Lawrence of Arcturus* or *The Maltese Vegan*? Why must even the good ones have flaws that no science fiction editor would tolerate?

**Barry:** These are sound and interesting questions. I've asked them myself.

When I saw *Blade Runner* in 1982 I came back from the Rialto Theatre in Ridgefield Park in quite a state and prepared for the sainted and level-headed Robert Silverberg, my friend and correspondent, a list of at least 20 points of plot and character which struck me as manifestly absurd . . . this was the stupidest film I had ever seen,

dumber than the old Saturday morning lineup, Superman serials and Three Stooges ten-minute routines. How could they do this to the audience, how could they do it to a reasonably intelligent, ambitious novel by a first-rank writer who had in the text not perpetrated any of these stupidities? Was it all a plot to make me miserable?

Silverberg's reply was to this effect and if I've misrepresented him I'll be welcome to correct in the next installment: yes, *Blade Runner* didn't make a whole lot of structural sense and the motivations were more than questionable. But the picture *felt* right, it had the right look, here at last was a film about the future which was not cheerful, which was not upbeat, which presented an extrapolated Los Angeles in the darkest terms and in terms which made the background at least consistent. This was worth more than a credible plot.

If I generalize from that response and I'll risk so doing, I'd say that's part of an answer: science fiction film is being judged by a standard different than that applied to film in general. It always has been. Filmmakers and audiences have collaborated on this . . . the audience, and that ranges from children to Robert Silverberg in his maturity and anyone between, does not make demands of science fiction films that would be made of non-science fiction. If it's weird, bizarre, has neat special effects, is either way up or way down, delivers something extrapolative and engineered, well, characters and a good plot would help but the background effects themselves might be enough. Certainly, the filmmakers from the beginning—I take the time of origin of the category science film as sometime in the late 1940's: *Destination Moon*, *The Thing*, *This Island Earth*—have seemed to operate from that position.

But there are a lot of contradictions, here. For one thing, *Blade Runner* was a commercial failure. It may in the so-called Director's Cut and in midnight showings to a cult audience in Los Angeles, almost twenty years after its original release, have crawled into the black, but it was not at all successful in first release. The producer who accepted the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation in Baltimore in 1983 thanked the audience and said something like "I'm glad you people liked it because nobody else did."

*Destination Moon*, on the other hand, did pretty well. *The Thing*, on a low budget, did outstandingly well and was remade by John Carpenter (at several hundred multiples of the original budget) in the late 1970s and apparently did fairly well. *The Thing* is pretty much of a hash (not at all faithful to Campbell's originating novelette, "Who Goes There?") and *Destination Moon* is fairly accurate so you can no more generalize about success than failure.

Film makers have as a group never really understood science fiction. The exceptions are Kubrick, whose *A Clockwork Orange* and *2001* are probably the two best science fiction films, and Ridley Scott who at least caught its spirit in *Blade Runner* (I reluctantly and finally agree with Silverberg). George Lucas kind of understands it, I think, but not at any point of the field's evolution past, say, 1950 and the end of the *Foundation* series. That may be a coincidence (because as you point out fantasy has had pretty good luck beginning with James Whale's *Frankenstein*) and we may simply be awaiting the first group of superannuated science fiction fans to move in with money and passion.

But my, oh my, so much filmed sf is terrible that you have to wonder. *The Puppet Masters* and *Martians, Go Home!* were terrible films of classic (hate that term) science fiction novels. Decades ago, the Sheckley-based *The Tenth Victim* did okay (Hollywood hyperbole; the short story was called "The Seventh Victim") but that was a transplanted James Bond film and it was all Ursula Andress anyway. *Starship Troopers* was at least an attempt, but Verhoeven did something very strange and very confirmatory of good old *auteur* theory by directing *against* the script for the first half; every image, every scene is a mockery of the text. *Freejack*, a film based on Sheckley's *Immortality, Inc.*, didn't last a week in the theatres.

*The Bicentennial Man* opened and departed quite quickly recently and we are still like Isaiah's troops waiting against the morning.

**Mike:** Well, one of the first problems I see is that every single film you named except for *The Tenth Victim* was adapted from a novel, and that's a tough order even for films where entire futures and civilizations don't have to be explained and justified in a painless manner. There's more than enough material for a two-hour movie in almost any 20-page short story; there's far too much in almost any novel.

The second problem is that, as the saying goes, Hollywood never met an old idea it didn't like. Did *Star Wars* make money? Then let's have dozens of mindless films that *look* like *Star Wars*, with a plethora of evil beings in masks, and

really stupid weapons like light sabres in an era of computer-enhanced handguns, and by all means let's have cute robots.

*The Fifth Element* wasn't much of a movie. Dumb as dirt, actually. But it was so nice to see a future that wasn't swiped from Lucas or Roddenberry's vision that it was like a breath of fresh air. (No, it wasn't original. It was based on the look of French comic books. I know. At one time *Santiago* had a French producer and he loaded me down with a dozen of the same comic books to show me what he wanted the galaxy to look like.)

A third problem is related to the second: once you're a hit, they can't buy enough of you. Hence, because *Destination Moon*, on which Heinlein worked, was a success, decades later they're still buying the brand name. Never mind whether *The Puppet Masters* looks (and sells) like a fourth remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, or that *Starship Troopers* could just as easily be called *Ken and Barbie Go to War*. To Hollywood all authors are interchangeable until one proves he can make them money, and then he's a cherished commodity for the rest of his life. And beyond.

Take a look at Philip K. Dick. *Blade Runner* didn't do him a bit of good; it lost money, and Hollywood cares as much about the Hugo and the Nebula as we care about the Most Valuable Player in the Canadian Curling League. But *Total Recall*, based as loosely as possible on Dick's "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale," made a ton of money, and suddenly it seems that every time you pick up a copy of *Locus* you see where Hollywood, which really doesn't know one story from another, has just optioned another Dick story for six or seven digits.

Good for Heinlein and good for Dick, and it's impossible to resent either of them garnering recognition and money even posthumously, but the simple fact of the matter is that not everything they wrote or everything Hollywood options from their estates is good movie material. (Yes, you can get around it by jettisoning almost everything that made the story memorable, as in *Total Recall* . . . but then, why buy it in the first place?) So a lot of their expensively optioned material goes unmade—a plight which is not unheard of. They've been trying to adapt Alfie Bester's *The Demolished Man* for better than 40 years now, without success. I'm sure that writers and executives have lost their careers over this project, but the truth is that some books and stories simply can't be adapted for the screen.

There are a lot of good stories out there, stories that would make excellent movies. Not necessarily the ones that pros and fans want to see, because—forgive me, but it's the truth—95% of them don't know how Hollywood functions, or what would make a good movie. Certainly the idea is *not* the key for the kind of audience Hollywood has to reach to show a profit.

It does seem rather sad, though, since we've reached the point with computer effects that just about anything a writer can imagine can be put on the screen in a believable manner.

Except, alas, good stories.

**Barry:** Your note on *The Demolished Man* amuses me.

A few years ago, in connection with the opening of the Oliver-Stone-film-before-the-last-Oliver-Stone-film (which of course was *Any Given Sunday*) there was a long *Sunday Times* interview; Stone said that he had had *The Demolished Man* under option for many years and had almost done it but had decided sometime in the late '80s that his time for it at least had passed, and he'd passed on the property. *The Demolished Man* by Oliver Stone! Ben Reich, you see, thinks that he's an industrialist, some kind of magnate, but what he doesn't know is that this memory wipe has stolen his real identity which was Head of the Psi Congress (he was the world's greatest telepath and they stole his ability too), he thinks that Prestign will help him but Prestign is really the guy who betrayed him and did the memory wipe and then killed Reich's father but Reich didn't know it was his father but anyway there's this girl who could have saved him from the memory wipe, his daughter in fact, but she ran away and Prestign says that Reich ought to avenge himself on the person who abandoned him who by the way is his father and Reich goes out to kill but it isn't his father you see and Reich—

Maybe it's a good thing that Stone did pass on it. But then again if Stone had made it in, say, 1984, you can be sure that the loudest laughter at the premiere, the roars and peals of laughter would have come from probably the only guy to stay around through all of the closing credits, that being Alfie Bester.

*Total Recall* of course is a good example of what I call the Uncertainty Effect which has always dominated



Hollywood. We are Uncertain. The film probably succeeded because Schwarzenegger in an action role sends grosses through the roof and there are terrific special effects—but then again maybe it succeeded because of the story? Okay, there was no story that made any sense . . . but then maybe it succeeded because of Phil Dick? Phil Dick wrote the underlying property, right, even if only the basic idea and one fragile scene remained, so you can't be absolutely sure that it wasn't. Anyway, if you're going to throw 50 or 75 million dollars into a production budget for a science fiction property, you want Schwarzenegger or someone like him and you want top special effects and while you're at it, just to be sure, on the 1/1000 chance that somehow it was Phil Dick, you'd better take one of his properties. I mean, who can be sure? We could all be out of work tomorrow. Think of Frank Capra or Veronica Lake.

The result: *Imposter*, a 5000-word story which sold to John Campbell in 1952 (Phil Dick's one and only sale to *Asounding* or *Analog*), is purchased for \$550,000. It will have been released before this exchange appears. I would wager that it failed, but I am Uncertain too. *Home Alone* opened to bad business on the first weekend and terrible reviews. Who knows?

Well, let us stipulate that it is the System itself which forces most science fiction on film to be terrible. Can it be altered? Is there anything to be done? Science fiction has plenty of moles already smuggled deep into the system . . . we all know their names, two of them have won seven or eight Hugos and Nebulas between them. One of them has already had a couple of films adapted from his first-rate work. You might be another (then again you might not . . . I am Uncertain). They haven't been able to change that system. Can you? Can anyone? Would you have any suggestions? Could anyone with less than a few hundred million to put up as front money have any real effect?

Mike: The biggest problem we confront is the fact that, thus far, science fiction fans (and by this I mean the fans of science fiction *movies*) have proven to be the least critical group in the history of the cinema. They will pay good money to see just about anything labeled "sci fi."

How else can you explain the fact that *Armageddon*—which, if it was a man, would have an IQ that could freeze water—was the Disney empire's top grosser last year? Or that for all its bad press and (deservedly) terrible reviews, *Godzilla* topped \$100 million in domestic earnings alone? Or that George Lucas could turn out what might arguably be the worst big-budget sf film of the decade and still gross close to a billion dollars worldwide with it?

I would like to think the independent producers I work with are different from most studio execs (they actually read books, so I *know* they're different), but the fact remains that 90% of Hollywood is convinced if you give the audience lots of special effects and call it "sci-fi" they'll pay to see it no matter how bad it is—and damned if I can prove them wrong.

Still, I think—I *hope*—we're on the verge of a breakthrough. We're between generations right now: the older one, which thinks all science fiction films must have a) a doddering scientist, b) his beautiful daughter, and c) a final line stating that there were some things that man was not meant to know (over and beyond how to write a cogent screenplay, that is) and the younger one, which grew up in a world that wasn't afraid of Heinlein, Asimov, Clarke and Bradbury, that had always accepted science fiction as a legitimate form of literature and entertainment, that has been reading Le Guin and Silverberg and Sheckley and Pohl and Bester (all names unknown to the older generation) since they were kids.

## TO BE CONTINUED....

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