

# N I N K

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## Digital... Discoverability

BY SHANNON DONNELLY

It's been a year since the article "Digital...Eventually" came out and the digital world is a lot like the dog world—time is compressed. It's not exactly a seven-to-one ratio, but a lot has happened. This year, the buzz word is "discoverability" as in *how does anyone find you, given all the hoopla and noise?* The noise has been big stuff, too.

Barnes & Noble began publishing more than just classics, and Amazon became a publisher, which has shaken up New York publishers. Amazon also launched the Select program for lending books, to additional flurry. Amanda Hocking became the 2011 poster girl for digital success. We've had existing publishers announcing their digital plans, ranging from Berkley/NAL bringing back Signet Regency romances as e-books under the InterMix imprint to HarperCollins publishing work from their Authonomy writers' site. Apple launched a new program for textbooks that has a whole lot of fine print. (But NY is still not talking about raising e-book royalty rates.)

You can follow the rest of what's going on at [www.DigitalBookWorld.com](http://www.DigitalBookWorld.com), on Bob Mayer's blog, <http://writeitforward.wordpress.com>, and at [www.PublishersWeekly.com](http://www.PublishersWeekly.com). But that's all big picture stuff. I'm here to talk about *my* year in the trenches. It may help with your own digital discoveries.

### THE NUMBERS

Let's start with what everyone wants to know—the numbers. I've sold more than 90,000 books this year. Yes, that's right, more than 90K. These are U.S.-only sales; the number doesn't include giveaways. Last year, I didn't pay much attention to international sales from Amazon; this year the numbers are growing fast, so I'll be watching that. My bestsellers last year were *A Proper Mistress* and *A Dangerous Compromise* (one also sold great in print, the other did not, so go figure).

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I've given away just over 15,000 copies of my Regency novella, *Cat's Cradle*, so total e-books out there for me is more than 100,000. That's respectable—not huge numbers, but not bad. It's also the first year I've made enough to say that I'm supporting myself with my writing—and not starving while doing so. Always a plus.

With this in mind, I brought out my first self-published book, a Regency Historical romance, *Paths of Desire*. Last year, my sales did not start moving upward until after June/July—just

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## Novelists, Inc.

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Complete committee member listings  
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<http://www.ninc.com>

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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: James LePore  
leporej5@optonline.net

### New Applicants:

Susan Anderson (Lindsay Randall), Smethport, PA  
Linda Goodnight, Wewoka, OK  
Louise Marley (Toby Bishop), Redmond, WA  
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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  
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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.

# A Native New Yorker

I'm a native New Yorker, though I have lived in Southern Connecticut in a New York suburb for the past twenty years. New Yorkers have a hard time feeling unfettered joy over anything. Maybe it's because we're taught at an early age to be on a constant lookout for danger. Maybe it's because even on the sunniest days there's always someone begging you for money, nearly knocking you over because he needs to get down the street *right now*, or jumping in front of you to steal your cab. For whatever reason, when native New Yorkers sense the onset of bliss, we activate the psychic mechanism designed to tamp it down.

I bring this up because it's my feeling that, when thinking about our industry, writers as a class are native New Yorkers. Even when we get good news—even when we get *consistent* good news—we tend to look for the bad news that will surely follow. I've seen a lot of that lately. I see it in the media coverage of the industry claiming that major publishing and virtually all booksellers are about to collapse and that one megalith is going to take over everything and turn writers and editors into minimum wage workers. I see it in the conversations I've had with a handful of our members who feel that the industry has marginalized them and forced them into involuntary retirement. I see it from many successful writers who react to every change in the business with proclamations of fear and paranoia.

Here's the bottom line, though: as far as NINC members are concerned, the business is in the best shape it has been for us for a long time. Here's why:

## Readers want us.

The Association of American Publishers is reporting that book sales in all sectors are down 3.3% for the first eleven months of 2011. BookScan reported a decline in sales across all sectors of 9% in 2011. This would be distressing if not for one hugely important fact: in one case, e-book sales are grossly underreported, and in the other, they're not reported at all.

The AAP reports sales from their member publishers. This includes all of the Big Six, religious publishers, textbook publishers, specialty publishers, and others. However, the AAP figures do not include sales from Kindle Direct or any of the Amazon imprints, PubIt, Smashwords, or the majority of small independents. This has an enormous dampening effect on the sales figures reported, particularly e-book sales. As I'm writing this, thirty-five of the Kindle Top 100 are either Kindle Direct books, titles from Amazon imprints, or books from small independents. I monitor this from time to time, and this number usually ranges from the low-thirties up to forty. Considering how much of Amazon's business comes from those hundred books, that's a tremendous amount of business that's not in the AAP numbers. And then when you consider how explosive the growth of all e-book business has been this year, it's easy to see how that 3.3% shortfall becomes meaningful growth. This is even truer when you look only at the trade book business, which is really the only part of the business that matters to novelists.

The BookScan numbers offer even more of a reason to be cheerful, if one were inclined to that sort of thing. BookScan says that sales are down 9% for the year. However, BookScan doesn't monitor *any* e-book sales. If e-books sales grew in very high double-digits in 2011 (which is what the AAP is saying *without* all of those sales from non-member publishers) and print sales only declined 9%, that's a sign of considerable growth.

The point to all of this is that readers expressed a renewed passion for books last year. Again, this is especially true of trade books, our business. I don't have hard figures on this, but I've heard anecdotally ▶

from a number of reliable sources that fiction is up dramatically. As long as this is true, regardless of the machinations within the industry, our prospects are encouraging.

But there's more.

### **We have options.**

We did an entire conference on this in the fall, so I'm not going to belabor the point here. If you weren't able to come to last year's NINC conference, check out the excellent coverage of it that appeared in *Nink* and is also available on our site. The main message here is that, while it's great if a publisher wants to offer us big advances and huge promotion budgets (or even modest advances with no promotion budgets), that's no longer the only path to having a sustainable writing career. There are many interesting boutique publishers with author-centric models, and of course there is the extremely viable option of publishing yourself. The latter is the most time-consuming, the most expensive, and by far the most labor intensive, but it also has the biggest upside. Well, second biggest to that massive advance, anyway.

The primary reason we have options is not that technology has made it possible. It's that readers are excited about reading fiction. The price advantage afforded digital readers has led avid fiction readers to become heavy consumers again. Four years ago, booksellers rolled their eyes when you pitched them a novel by anyone other than a brand name. Digital has changed that completely. Fiction—especially commercial fiction—has benefitted the most.

The options aren't just in who we can publish with; it's also in what we can publish. I can attest to this personally. Early last year, I published a novel that fit into several categories, but no particular one. It was exactly the kind of thing that publishers have been shying away from for years because they "don't know where it goes in the store." It turned out to be the second most successful book of my career. The idea of forcing writers to stick to definable categories because that's how bookstores are set up is one of the most sales-suppressing conventions ever. It flies in the face of how most readers read. Yes, there are certainly readers who only read one genre. Hey, there are even readers who only read one *subgenre*. But most readers are much more flexible than this. They want books they can love, not books that follow particular rules. It is more possible than it has been in a couple of decades to succeed with a novel that breaks out of genre boxes.

### **We have each other.**

The fact that writers now play a much bigger role in the fates of their careers than they have in the past means that more writers know more about what it takes to succeed than ever before. In the years since I've been a NINC member, I've noticed a profound change in how conversant our membership is in the process of publishing. The knowledge base in this organization is dazzling. I'm guessing that most of you don't realize how *smart* we are.

I believe we have within this organization the resources to address nearly any eventuality in the industry. We know how to write, we know how to package, we know how to court an audience, we know how to spread the word, and we know how the various systems in the business operate. When you combine that with my two earlier points, you have very, very strong reasons to be optimistic.

Still, not all of us are benefitting from this. I know that several of our members are thinking that they might have written their last novel and that others haven't written a novel in years. This is a very sad thing during such an exciting time. Therefore, I'd like to ask all of our membership this: what can we do to make sure that as many of us as possible prosper from a growing market? Do we ratchet up the level of discourse on the link? Do we start a series of monthly webinars? Do we find some other ways to pool our knowledge and resources?

If you're struggling right now, I'd love to hear about what you think you need. If you're doing especially well, I'd love to hear what expertise you'd be willing to share with the organization (and some of you are already wonderful about this; thank you). As always, you can reach me at [laronica@fictionstudio.com](mailto:laronica@fictionstudio.com).

I'm feeling very optimistic about the future for fiction writers. That's saying something, considering I'm a native New Yorker.

— Lou Aronica

# Digital... Discoverability

*Continued from page 1* ▶ after I brought out all eight of my Regency romances, so having a quantity of work out there does seem to make a difference. Sales really took off in September/October, when I dropped the price from \$2.99 to \$.99. I've pretty much left the prices there. Before we dig further into pricing and promotion, let's step back a bit and talk some basics.

## FORMATS

This one's still a must for any e-book; I see books from the NY publishers that have the same formatting issues. It's a tricky thing to get an e-book to look as it should, particularly across all the various platforms. Last year, bringing out my backlist meant getting a very clean Microsoft Word file, setting up a simple style sheet, and then letting PubIt, Amazon, and Smashwords do the formatting to e-book. This year it's a different story.

A few programs have helped with additional format clean-up, so the books look better. I've learned to take my Word files and save them—once they're in clean, simple style sheets—as “Web Page, Filtered.” This HTML file gets cleaned up with a simple HTML editor; I love Coffee Cup for this. Once the HTML looks good, I import the file into Mobipocket Creator. Like Coffee Cup, this is a free program. While Mobi has its quirks, it's pretty easy to use. With Mobi, I add the cover, metadata, book description, ISBN, and suggested pricing, and convert the file into e-book format. I then look at the e-book file in Calibri, a free e-book manager that lets me make sure the formatting is correct. Seeing how the book will look in an e-reader helps me, and I can add additional tags and information to make the book highly searchable.

**NOTE:** I'd recommend that when you buy your ISBNs from Bowkers, make sure you upload a CSV file, which you can create in Excel, with keywords so searches can more easily find your books. Keywords or tags should include your name, the book title, and any special characteristics or genre information about the book.

In Calibri, I look for odd paragraphs and font formats, weird spacing, and symbols that don't belong in the text. If I find such things, I go back to the Word or HTML file to sort it out (it's almost always an issue with the style sheet). I've slowly been moving my other books into this new formatting process to ▶

## Style Sheets: It's a Technical Thing

Word-processing programs, such as Microsoft Word, provide several ways to format text. You can apply formatting—italics, bold, different fonts, etc.—to individual words, sentences, or paragraphs but in an e-book document, this introduces extra formatting code that can cause issues later. Instead, set up universal formatting using a “style sheet.” You can work from preset template styles (Word has the option to “change styles,” allowing you to select a template of styles) or modify existing styles by right-clicking on them. For instance, you can redefine “Normal” text to suit you (e.g., 12 pt TNR, first paragraph indented .5 inch, single-spaced, no spaces before or after the paragraph), highlight the paragraphs you want to be “Normal,” and apply the “Normal” style.

Follow similar steps to format styles for chapter headings, scene-break marks, title, and other special text. You can format individual words as needed, but if you have an entire paragraph of italics, it's worth setting up a style. With your style sheet in place, the file can be converted cleanly to HTML and e-book formats. For more information on setting up style sheets in Word, go to Twelve Steps to a Digital Format on my website.

give the e-books a cleaner design. I've also been correcting typos as I go, and adding promotional information into the back of the e-books, because this year it's all about how readers find the books.

## PROMOTION

"Discoverability" was the word batted around at the NINC conference this past October—how does a reader find your books? I was fortunate enough to get my books onto the top-selling list at Amazon—*A Proper Mistress* was in the Top 10 overall sellers (not Regency category, not Romance, but overall). So, success does breed success. Sometimes it is just an issue of luck or timing. Other than this, I didn't do much for promotion. However, I am online.

I blog regularly at [sd-writer.com](http://sd-writer.com), I'm on Twitter and Facebook, and I do promote my work, but I don't have huge reach. My Klout score hovers in the high 30s (and if you don't know what Klout is, it may be time for you to improve your Social Media awareness). I've tried a couple of online ads, but haven't noticed any impact from them. Same with reviews; I'm not sure they do much for a book, but I figure they'll help with awareness.

I believe awareness is the key.

To help with reader awareness, I put *Cat's Cradle* up as a free novella. It's been on the Amazon Top 100 free e-books list, but I can't say that the free novella has really helped the other books to sell more. I do think free works best when it's the first book in a series—I've gotten hooked on Bob Mayer's Atlantis series that way. With the free book promotion, I'm selling steadily, but not at the peak numbers. I've left the novella out there for promotion, but it may get a price tag put onto it at some point.

Which brings us to the issue of pricing.

## PRICING

My sales took off at the \$.99 price point. I know publishers complain about this number; in fact, I think they turn pale when this number comes up as a price point for any book. Others think it's undervaluing your work (and folks seem to forget that paperbacks started off as cheap dime novels). For me, the \$.99 price made sense for two reasons.

First, my backlist has already made money. These are books that were done and finished and sold, so it's all gravy from here. Second, aren't we all watching the budget these days? The economy is bad, and my book-buying budget no longer includes any book that's over ten bucks. In fact, I really like books that sell for a buck or two. (I can go three or four at a stretch, and that's about it.) I love the low-cost books because I still read a lot, so what's easy on my pocketbook is an easy sale. The way I figure it, I'm not the only one looking for a bargain.

This notion showed up, too, at the last NINC conference in the data presented by Carolyn Pittis of HarperCollins. Over the past year, the bestsellers at Amazon have been priced either low (\$.99) or high, but not in the middle. I don't have a household name (or a huge marketing budget) that will make that high price point work for me—and Regency romances aren't big blockbuster books. This same statistic about price-point sensitivity also showed up in a recent *Publisher's Weekly* article (<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/content-and-e-books/article/50371-tracking-amazon-low-prices-dominate-kindle-romance-chart.html>). So, at the lower price point, I make a better profit in quantity.

Last November, I tried out a price increase back to \$2.99, but this impacted sales numbers, so now all my books are priced around \$.99 to \$1.99. However, I've brought my new book out at \$3.99, so I can discount it and do specials.

I'm also still trying to make sense of all the data from the last year. Why does one book sell better at \$1.99 than it did at \$.99? Is it the cover? The cover copy? The timing of its release? The lunar cycle? Why does a book that did not-so-well in print do great online? What's the difference? Do the monthly trends mean anything, or is this market in such flux that there are no trends, just an ever-changing tide? Sometimes my head hurts from trying to make sense of everything, so I go back to writing; this marketing stuff is not for sissies.

Which brings us to the next big issue for being discoverable.

## EXPERIMENTATION

For me, 2012 is all about experimental promotion. I've sent *Paths of Desire* out for reviews (if you want a free copy and will post a review at Amazon or BN.com, email me). I'm trying cross-promotion with other authors on their blog sites. For additional exposure, I've posted my backlist to <http://www.backliste-books.com>. I also regularly give workshops. I'll be speaking at the 2012 RWA conference, and I've brought out one of my workshop books as an e-book: *Story Showing; Story Telling*. I want to experiment more with cover designs, and with bundling some of my books, which should work great given that some of the books are connected. Most of all, I want to get more books out there.

I've had readers asking for Diana's story, a character from *Lady Scandal* whose story I've always wanted to write, and Jane's, from *A Dangerous Compromise*. I'd also love to put out two other Regency romances sitting around that need editing. So, much more writing must be done because I can't sell a book I haven't finished. Then it's time to edit, format, and get the word out there.

But, really, the truth is that *no one knows what works*.

Some books just sell better than others. Some authors sell better than others. And some books sell better on Amazon than on Barnes & Noble. (I include these two big outlets because, for me, Smashwords does not produce great sales, and I've left the prices higher there because the numbers do not justify a price drop.) I haven't figured out why BN.com is lower for me, but Liz Scheier of Barnes & Noble was at the 2011 NINC and was made aware of how many authors (besides me) found their books to be lagging at BN.com but doing great at Amazon. I have seen performance improve at BN.com since last October, so maybe Liz is having an impact. I know Amazon has a lot of great promotion tools, and it's really hard not to give Amazon the focus when they're producing the profit.

I've put two books into the Amazon Select program. The downside is that the books must be exclusive to Amazon to be in the program. The upside is that Amazon will pay for every book borrowed. This payment may not be enough to offset the loss of sales from other sites, but I do like the idea of book-lending—I got my reading start at a library, so I'm a supporter of book-lending.

Which brings us to...

## PIRACY

For me, this is still a non-issue. If you have a huge brand, maybe this is something you need to look at. But Digital Rights Management (DRM) still sucks, and even Amazon has started moving away from it, with their changes to allowing authors to set DRM in 2010 (see the article on Amazon's change for DRM management <http://www.niemanlab.org/2010/01/amazon-quietly-lets-publishers-remove-drm-from-kindle-ebooks/>), and with their Amazon Select program to lend books. As noted in a recent article in *Publisher's Weekly*, calling for publishers to become sane about the DRM issue (<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/content-and-e-books/article/50484-the-toc-perspective-a-call-for-a-unified-e-book-market.html>): "...a study last year by Rice University and Duke University contends that removing DRM can actually decrease piracy."

Fighting piracy has just about killed the record industry. I have neither their resources nor their interest in this battle. I still maintain that if you post your work for sale at a price buyers consider reasonable and it's easy to buy, most folks will opt to purchase it.

## RESULTS

When I wrote the article last year, I'd started down the digital path in November and wrote the article in mid-December, when I was putting my third book online. At that point, the three titles (*Under the Kissing Bough*, *Proper Conduct*, and *A Proper Mistress*) had netted \$201.96 from Amazon, \$147.70 from PubIt, and \$57.09 from Smashwords.

In other words, this time last year, I'd made about \$400 for the previous year. My total budget for covers, ISBNs, and some online promotion was \$5,000.



Now, with 100,000 books sold, I've made back my investment, and more. And these predictions have come true:

- ▶ Sales of Kindle and Nook are anticipated to explode (they did)
- ▶ Digital media consumption is on the rise (it still is)

In fact, the Kindle Fire is reported to have sold over six million units. BN's Nook sales are up 70% this year over the previous year, but are still behind Kindle sales. All of this means that while you may not see your book hit the bestseller lists, your sales numbers could still go up (a larger market means more sales are needed to hit the tops of the lists).

So what's ahead for this year in the trenches?

For me, more books, more experiments. The noise is going to be noisier this year. By next year, I'll let you know how the self-publishing is going. And I hope to have a couple of more books out and available. Would I say no to a NY deal? Maybe. Or maybe not. But the NY deals are no longer the only path, and a lot of times, they're not a great deal, either; not with lower advances and royalties than you can get from doing the work yourself. The world has changed in the last year. It'll change even more—that's one prediction you can bet on. And it's no longer *Digital Eventually*...it's become *Digital Inevitably*.

*Award-winning author Shannon Donnelly's work has garnered high praise from Romantic Times, Booklist and other reviewers. Her Regency romances are available on Amazon, BN.com, and Smashwords. She also writes novellas, young adult horror stories, and computer games. Shannon can be found online at [www.sd-writer.com](http://www.sd-writer.com), Facebook, and <https://twitter.com/#!/sdwriter>.*

## ***NINC Bulletin Board***

Compiled by Kit Frazier / [kitfrazier@yahoo.com](mailto:kitfrazier@yahoo.com)

### **JOT—Just One Thing. . . We still need volunteers—**

If you're interested in ensuring that we continue to have industry guests blogging every Wednesday on the NINC Blog, please contact Patricia Rosemoor at [Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com](mailto:Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com)

### **Promote NINC, Promote Yourself—on the NINC Blog**

If you haven't registered, please do so at <http://www.NINC.com/blog/> Fill out the profile, then e-mail Patricia Rosemoor at [Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com](mailto:Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com)

### **Computer Help**

Is your computer running slow or getting weird error messages? Is your printer acting up? NINC's Member-to-Member Services includes a PC repair service right over the Internet:

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



# ***NINC Blast—Novelists, Inc.’s Best-Kept Secret—Revealed!***

BY BINNIE SYRIL BRAUNSTEIN

So why did I feel the need to write an article about the NINC Blast? Because I keep discovering—to my shock—that NINC authors are writing and producing books, novellas, short stories, etc. and very often—too often—aren’t letting me know about them. And if I don’t know about them, I can’t promote their upcoming releases by including them in NINC Blast. So, let me play reporter and ask—and answer—the famous questions: **Who, what, when, where, why and how?**

**Who** am I? The editor of this organization’s best-kept secret: the NINC Blast.

**What** is NINC Blast? It’s an electronic, digital, free (!) newsletter that features and promotes works of fiction by NINC members and provides that and other NINC-related information for free (!) to anyone and everyone who wants to subscribe.

**When** is it published? Bi-monthly.

**Where** is it? Coming to your very own email box, if you subscribe to it. I can’t subscribe you; you (and anyone else) have to “opt in.” There’s a NINC Blast box on NINC’s home page. Go click it, if you haven’t already done so. And feel free to tell your friends, fellow authors, your editor, in-house publicist, bookseller, and librarian to find it and click it!

**Why?** Because we want to take every opportunity to promote our members’ fiction.

**How?** By providing Featured Author articles and links to exciting member benefits on NINC’s home page, such as to the Next Page, NINC’s Speaker’s Bureau, NINC’s Annual Conference, etc. And beginning with the February issue of the Blast, we’ll be including information about NINC’s upcoming anthology, *A Cast of Characters*. The Blast also includes cover thumbnails of NINC authors’ upcoming releases; the thumbnails are hot-linked to the author’s URL/website, so you are only a click away from finding out more about the books.

The Blast also includes jaw-dropping tidbits in the “Did you know…” feature, which gives readers rare insight to unusual facets of NINC authors’ personalities. You don’t have to have an upcoming book in order to be included in “Did you know…” In fact, feel free to contact me for a tidbit sampler—and then send me some, or some more—of your own. I always need grist for the mill.

So how does this process actually work? Well, about two months before sending out a Blast, I send an email to all members at the email address we have on file. In it, I request information about upcoming books, including e-books and re-issues, that have a release date within two months of the issue of the Blast. E.g., the February 2012 Blast includes information about books with release dates in March and April 2012. To be included, you need to provide me with the following information by the date stipulated in the Blast:

- ▶ Your name (the name on the title page of your book)
- ▶ The book title(s)
- ▶ Your URL(s)
- ▶ Your book cover(s) (If your cover isn’t available yet, all is not lost. We’ll chat.)

If you have more than one book coming out—great! Let me know about them all. We also welcome information about novellas, essays, and short stories in anthologies. Please be sure to include the name and the cover thumbnail of the anthology.

One more thing: NINC has a symbiotic relationship with Tracee Gleichner and her blog, *Literal Exposure*; we promote LE in the Blast, and she blogs with NINC Authors who have upcoming releases. So ▶

each time you contact me about an upcoming release, I provide your email address and book info to Tracee. So that's my story; promoting NINC and its members is the *raison d'être* for the NINC Blast. And nobody better get between me and my *raison d'être*—it might get ugly.

*Baltimore native and former librarian Binnie Syril Braunstein is the author of three novels and 49 published short stories. She is also a publicist for quite a few authors and enjoys creating customized PR projects for clients, as well as themed baskets to promote her clients' books, both print and "e." Binnie is currently working on "e" versions of her short stories, as well as a plot that "simply won't go away."*

## Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

### Amazon Publishing: Where's the brick-and-mortar market?

Both Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million have announced they won't carry any Amazon Publishing titles, including the Houghton Mifflin imprint, New Harvest. PW reported mixed responses from independent booksellers; some are adamant that they will not carry Amazon products, while others are waiting to see the terms. The B&N/BAM reaction is similar to the reaction to B&N's purchase of Sterling in 2003. B&N is reported to be unloading the nonfiction publisher.

*Tip Sheet*

## NINC Bulletin Board

### Got Promo?

Get unique and creative promotional products, including custom-decorated wearables, personalized pens, notepads, magnets, mugs, chocolates, and bookmarks for giveaways and gifts at:

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

Or contact Peggy Palter at [Palvaulte@aol.com](mailto:Palvaulte@aol.com)

### Upcoming Gatherings of Note

**Maine Festival of the Book:** March 29-April 1, Portland, ME

[www.MaineReads.org](http://www.MaineReads.org)

**2012 Backspace Writers Conference:** May 24-26, New York City, NY

[www.backspacewritersconference.com](http://www.backspacewritersconference.com)

**Book Expo America:** June 4-7, New York City, NY

[www.Bookexpoamerica.com](http://www.Bookexpoamerica.com)

**Writers' League of Texas 2012 Agents Conference:** June 22-24, Austin TX

[www.writersleague.org/38/Agents-Conference](http://www.writersleague.org/38/Agents-Conference)

# Crowdfunding for Fiction

BY ELAINE ISAAK

In publishing right now, the author is often caught between the benefits of traditional publishing (advances, no financial investment) and the risks and rewards of independent publishing. Even for the multi-published author, trad publishers are less likely to take risks on new material, or to continue a series that doesn't start off with a bang. As excited as we all are by the potential offered by e-books in a time of publishing upheaval, even producing a reprint e-book requires an investment in time and money. Covers must be designed, text laid out and formatted properly, and for new titles, some level of editing is required. What's a midlist author to do?

Crowdfunding provides an interesting solution to many of these dilemmas, with a forum in which you invite the financial support of fans, readers, and friends to get a project off the ground. Crowdfunding might provide the advance you need to write the next book in a cancelled series or to try a new fictional venture. It might provide funds to design covers and pay for the production of e-book versions of reverted titles. In many ways, it represents a return to the Renaissance model of patronage in which artists were supported not by the direct sale of the work, but by funding from those who wished to encourage its production.

Much of the process of crowdfunding is structured by the writer. You decide how much money you need and select incentives to encourage participation. Backers pledge to give a certain dollar amount to support the project, which is charged after the project closes. If you do not achieve your funding goal, no money changes hands: you don't have to spend time on a project for which you're not fully funded, and the backers don't have to pay for something that won't get off the ground. But the best part is that some projects exceed their funding goal. A search of [www.Kickstarter.com](http://www.Kickstarter.com) (the most well-known crowdfunding site) turns up 766 projects listed as "novel," many of which are graphic novel projects, including one that achieved 558% funding—more than \$50,000. If your project succeeds (i.e., is fully funded), you could be making serious money. If it doesn't, you haven't lost anything but the time it took to post and promote the project.

New author MeiLin Miranda's current project pops up first on the search; it is 228% funded (or \$3,582) with 21 days left to go. Miranda's first novel was personally crowdfunded (at \$2,500) through contact with her own fans in 2009—before the advent of websites that facilitate the process. Many of her original backers have returned at higher funding levels for her Kickstarter project, which is a sequel titled *Son in Sorrow*.

Multi-published traditional authors like Tobias Buckell, whose latest book is *Arctic Rising*, and C. E. Murphy have seen even greater success. Murphy's fifth crowdfunded project is a novella written from the point of view of a secondary character in her Walker Papers urban fantasy series. The project had a modest goal of \$4,000, but achieved more than \$20,000 in funding. She says of the process, "I honestly just sat there gaping while the numbers kept ticking up." Buckell's innovative science fiction receives praise from many, but his series at Tor experienced flat sales, and he and his publishing team decided to move on. Rather than abandon the two additional books he'd planned, Buckell ran a Kickstarter campaign for the fourth volume. Author Matt Forbeck has received national publicity for his ambitious Kickstarter campaign to write twelve novels in twelve months.

What does it take to set up a project? Decide what funding level you need before you undertake the project. That may mean getting estimates on cover art, layout, and editorial work for a reprint project, or considering what sort of advance would be worth your time for writing a novel. Kickstarter says that most projects are under \$10,000 and that slightly fewer than half of projects achieve full funding. Buckell cited common wisdom on crowdfunding that suggests most projects that achieve at least 30% funding will go on to succeed.

Some of the authors I spoke to noted that one risk here is failing in public. If your agent can't sell your new book, it's up to you whether you share that information. But if funding is slow or doesn't succeed on your Kickstarter page, it's right there for all the world to see. Many of the statistics I'm quoting—percentages, numbers of backers at a certain level, and dollar amounts—are available on the project ▶

pages, and you may be able to find such information for a project similar to your own in order to gauge likely response and determine a reasonable price. Clearly, the most successful authors here are working with an established audience, and they are able to reach out to their existing fan base to support the project and spread the word. The authors of failed projects may feel bitter—may feel, in fact, that they’ve been rejected by their own fans. Ouch! Be ready to handle that disappointment if this happens to you.

To prepare your crowdfunding site, you’ll need an image to grab the browser’s attention, similar to a cover image—something that catches the eye and speaks to the reader of your type of work. Buckell and Murphy both have short videos on the page. You’ll need to write some seductive ad-copy that appears on the listing, describing what the project is about. You will need to come up with a list of pledge levels and incentive items—just like fundraising on public radio. Pledges can start as low as \$1, but Buckell noted that most backers buy in at a few price levels, so he focused on \$25, \$50 and \$100, with special, limited incentives for those who offered higher backing. Kickstarter’s website says that the average pledge is \$71, and most people buy in at \$25. You should let people know when work on the project will begin, how long it’s expected to last, and when they will receive their incentives. You may also offer ramp-up bonuses if you exceed your goal.

Most authors offer an e-book or print version of the finished work as an incentive. Miranda offered the raw text—hot off the presses, as it were, to satisfy the most rabid fans. Similarly, at the \$250 level and above, Buckell offered to send the pages weekly to his backers through a special listserv (he got three backers at this level, and three at the \$1000 level who also received that benefit). Tuckerization—the right to name a character or location in the book, or sometimes to serve as a character in the book—is another incentive offered at higher levels as appropriate to the work. Murphy says she made some poor choices for incentives, like custom-printed calendars that were expensive to produce.

Buckell’s own research suggested that backers get overwhelmed by having too many choices, so he kept it to six levels of backing. Other authors have offered exclusive short stories, artwork (self-created, or commissioned for the work), or a Skype chat with the author. Kickstarter advises being creative with your incentives. At the highest levels, only a limited number of backers may buy-in, building a sense of excitement and exclusivity. On the project pages, you’ll see a note of how many pledges are available at a certain level, and a “sold out” marker appears if they’re already gone. Buckell did note that he wished he had offered something fun for backers under \$25, like a signed postcard, to encourage those who were not in a position to pledge more. Many backers buy in because they want to help the author or artist do their work, to feel that they are a part of the process. Incentive levels are cumulative—so the \$250 backer also receives whatever you’ve offered at the lower levels.

You’ll need to spend a bit of time courting your backers as the project progresses, and the websites make it easy to do this with an “updates” section where you can post, and a comments section for your backers. It’s clear from the comments that backers enjoy being involved in the creation of the work. They like the personal connection with the author, and the sense that they are supporting something they love. Interestingly, Murphy says this connection with her audience helped to spur her own creativity, especially for a crowdfunded novel revision she’d been avoiding.

All of the authors observed that they tended to get a big surge right at the start, then another as the project neared its closing. Buckell recommends announcing your project early in the day when you begin, giving yourself plenty of time for that initial wave. Miranda’s first crowdfunding project was reopened briefly because so many people protested having missed the deadline. Buckell observed that the first and last days are the most critical. Be prepared to send out a social media blitz on Twitter, Facebook, and your blog. Send emails to your fan list, as well as friends and family members—and ask them to pass it along to other interested parties. Murphy expressed some concern about having spent too much time on her media outlets flogging her Kickstarter, but again, the fans seemed more amused and invested in her as an author, rather than annoyed.

Before committing to a crowdfunding site, check out the fee structure. At the moment, you don’t pay to list your project, you pay when it closes and you receive the money. Current crowdfunding champion Kickstarter charges 5%, and passes along the Amazon payments transaction fees for receiving money, leading to a

cost of about 8 to 10% of the funding (another factor to consider in how much money you try to raise). [www.RocketHub.com](http://www.RocketHub.com) charges a flat fee of 8%. [www.indiegogo.com](http://www.indiegogo.com) is another popular site. It offers a "flexible funding" option in which you receive the money even if you haven't achieved your goal, but the site charges a higher flat fee (9%) for that option. Foreign transaction fees, credit card processing, and PayPal fees are likely to be extra.

With crowdfunding, you retain all of the rights to the work done through the crowdfunded sites. However, newcomer [www.Gluejar.com](http://www.Gluejar.com) works exclusively with books, raising funds for works which will then be released via a Creative Commons license, encouraging a reader-support system for authors rather than a publisher-defined model.

Crowdfunding looks to be an interesting way for authors to make money and continue to produce works outside of the traditional publishing format. It's clearly a success for authors with a fan base or those working in an established series, but even newer authors who are willing to reach out and publicize their projects can do well.

*After doing the research for this article, Elaine Isaak is eagerly looking into creating her own crowdfunding project, perhaps to support an innovative new fantasy world.*

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## *Business Briefs*

### **News from Digital Book World: Will publishers live up to their panel discussion?**

The past year of writers going into self-distribution has publishers remorseful for not having better relationship with authors. One result seems to be publishers' belated realization that communication with the authors needs to improve. Another result is improved online access to sales figures and providing details on the services publishers are providing for contracted authors. What a concept, right? *Publishers Weekly*

### **More News from Digital Book World: Are librarians really sluts because they "give" books away?**

The DBW panel acknowledged that publishers are confused by libraries' role in the e-book industry. To help ease the pain, the American Library Association met with publishers after the ALA's midwinter conference to discuss the libraries' role with respect to e-books. The meeting targeted publishers that don't allow library e-lending: Macmillan, Simon & Schuster, Penguin, and Hachette, and addressed licensing, accessibility, and archiving in the new environment. One solution for library lending is a platform that offers library clients a user-friendly purchase option. *Publishers Weekly*

### **Royalties Revisited**

In late February, Simon & Schuster announced a "substantially redesigned" royalty statement that will be made available online to their authors as PDFs. The new design is the result of collaboration and consultation with agents, the AAR royalty committee, and <gasp> authors. The newly designed statement will provide authors with "more granular data" and "flexibility in delivery options." One agent who was involved in the effort called the new design "concise, comprehensive, uncluttered, and easy to understand." Random House is also apparently revising its statement design, and other publishers are expected to follow suit. *Publishers Marketplace*

### **Update on HarperCollins/Open Road Lawsuit**

And the fight rages on. While HarperCollins is claiming it holds the rights to Jean Craighead George's book *Julie of the Wolves* because it published the original print version, Open Road maintains that it has a contract with Ms. George, who retained the e-rights. Open Road released a statement from Ms. George that states "When I signed that contract in 1971, e-books did not exist so I could not have granted those rights." However the case is decided, it will be sure to be a landmark case for the industry—and every author with a backlist. *TeleRead*

## ***The Mad Scribbler***

By **Laura Resnick**



# **“A Bite of the Big Apple”**

**“You must see why I love New York. Because the whole world’s in New York...”**

**— Oriana Fallaci, Italian journalist and novelist**

One of the pleasures of my work these days is that I get to go to New York once or twice a year to do on-site research for my Esther Diamond fantasy series.

Esther Diamond is a struggling actress who gets involved in mystical misadventures while pursuing her career, befriending various eccentric New Yorkers, falling in love with a skeptical cop, and saving her city from Evil (yes, Evil). Each novel in the series focuses on a different supernatural subject (doppelgangers, vampires, zombies) and a different aspect of the city (Little Italy, Harlem, the West Village, New York’s subterranean tunnels).

My research trips to New York provide me with local color, verisimilitude, and key story elements. Each individual neighborhood or thematic aspect of the Big Apple provides a cornucopia of juicy fictional possibilities.

For example, one of the things I discovered several years ago when exploring Harlem for *Unsympathetic Magic* (the third Esther Diamond novel) was the Mount Morris watch tower in Marcus Garvey Park (aka Mount Morris Park). It’s the only surviving example of about a dozen cast-iron towers that were erected in the 1850s for New Yorkers to watch for fires and sound the alarm, back when Harlem was farm country. The imposing, skeleton-like iron tower, set deep inside a park, can only be approached by climbing a steep, old stone staircase that’s surrounded by dense tree growth. Built atop a rocky promontory, the tower (which is now in need of repair and restoration) is very tall, looming, and gothically forbidding-looking. A broad, abandoned stone plaza lies at its base, surrounded by treetops. Right in the middle of Harlem.

My first thought upon discovering this place—when I was all alone on a gloomy, rainy afternoon—was that I felt like someone who had just stumbled across a mysterious, forgotten, and somewhat sinister ancient ruin in a remote jungle. (And the tower does seem to be rather forgotten. I asked a Harlem tour guide about it, and he had no idea what I was talking about.) My second thought was that it seemed like a place built for human sacrifice... which was when I realized what the climactic scene of *Unsympathetic Magic* would be.

So, naturally, soon after I decided to set the series’ sixth book, *The Misfortune Cookie*, in Chinatown during Chinese New Year, I began making plans to go to there during that festival.

One of my first challenges was figuring out who I could sucker into going with me, so I’d have some company for four days of trudging around Chinatown in snow, sleet, and freezing rain. I immediately thought of my friend Cindy, who I grew up with and who can be talked into doing almost anything as long as it sounds colorful and outlandish. With that in mind, I may have exaggerated my expectations when describing the trip to her. However, while we were there, we did break into a publishing house one night at 2:00 a.m. to steal books (well, okay, we had my publisher and her keys with us), so Cindy was not disappointed by the trip. But I digress.

Chinese New Year, which is their most important traditional holiday, is based on a lunar calendar, which is why the date changes every year (in terms of our solar calendar); the event typically occurs in January or February. Although we tend to think of it as taking place on the day of the famous Chinatown parades in New York and San Francisco, it's actually a two-week holiday with several major events. For various reasons, I decided to visit New York a week before the parade so that I could attend the Firecracker Festival, which is held on the first day of the lunar New Year.

We arrived in Chinatown a few days before New Year and kicked off our activities by visiting the Eldridge Street Synagogue, built in 1887, which is now a beautifully restored historic landmark and museum (and remains a functioning synagogue, though the congregation is very small). In the late 19th century, this building was in the middle of lower Manhattan's densely populated neighborhood of Jewish immigrants. Now, however, it sits in the heart of Chinatown—as does the formerly Irish (and then later Italian) Church of the Transfiguration, which offers daily Mass in Mandarin and Cantonese. Chinatown has grown over the past century from a couple of streets to an area that now includes much of what was once Five Points, Little Italy, and the Lower East Side. I highly recommend the excellent guided tours at the Eldridge Street Synagogue—which hosts the Egg Rolls & Egg Creams Festival every June, celebrating the Jewish and Chinese communities that have contributed so much to New York City's culture.

My editor and publisher, Betsy Wollheim of DAW Books, joined us for a three-hour food tour of Chinatown hosted by the Enthusiastic Gourmet aka Susan Rosenbaum, a culinary professional and licensed NYC tour guide. This outing was very useful in terms of research, and was tremendous fun. In addition to being engaging and (as titled) enthusiastic, Rosenbaum knows her subject matter and the neighborhood well, and so we learned a lot about Chinatown's customs, culture, and characters through learning about its food (via visiting a butcher, a bakery, a produce market, a tofu factory, a sweets shop, and so on).

The only downside of this venture was that I accidentally ate dried cuttlefish, which is not something I will ever do again—ever. Eating a shrimp's head was less disturbing, though it's a gustatory experience that might not suit everyone. And take my advice: *never* go near a fruit (or any food made thereof) called “durian”; I would describe the smell and flavor as a combination of raw sewage, spoiled milk, and a chemistry lab accident. On the other hand, I fell madly in love with delicately yellow egg custards, steaming fresh bowls of tofu with the consistency of clotted cream, and, in particular, soup dumplings—which are Chinese dumplings filled with flavorful hot broth. I doubt I will ever find anything more luscious and satisfying than a soup dumpling to pop into my mouth (one has to open *wide* for this) on a blustery cold day.

During our four days of poking around the neighborhood, we did two additional walking tours whose guides frankly paled in comparison to Rosenbaum's depth of local knowledge, but which were nonetheless worthwhile. Big Onion, a company that operates city-wide and whose tours are conducted mostly by graduate students, hosted a two-hour tour of the neighborhood that focused on its history, the changing patterns of Chinese immigration in New York, and current social issues. And the Museum of the Chinese in America offered a tour that focused on the preparations the locals were making for New Year's and the various customs of the holiday. The museum itself hosts many programs, activities, and projects, as well as having a permanent exhibition about the Chinese experience in America.

The Year of the Dragon kicked off with the Firecracker Festival on our final day there. Due to city ordinances, real firecrackers (the dangerous kind) can only be used during the festival under controlled ▶

## **Laura Recommends:**

### **Resources on the Web:**

Mount Morris Watch Tower:

<http://firewatchtower.com/>

Eldridge Street Synagogue:

<http://www.eldridgestreet.org/>

The Enthusiastic Gourmet:

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

Museum of the Chinese In America:

<http://www.mocanyc.org/>

Big Onion Walking Tours:

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

Explore Chinatown (website with resources for visitors):

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

### **And a couple of enjoyable books:**

*Chinatown, New York: Portraits, Recipes, and Memories* by Ann Volkwein

*The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food* by Jennifer 8 Lee

circumstances and must be handled by professionals. But I was delighted with the “fake” firecrackers used throughout Chinatown all day long, which make a faint popping noise and shoot out bursts of colorful confetti that gently shower down on the streets and the crowds (dense but well-behaved).

Lion dancers are a major part of the Firecracker Festival, and their story encompasses history, customs, and training that are complex and fascinating—some of which will undoubtedly work its way into *The Misfortune Cookie*, since I loved the lion dancers. You’ve probably seen photos or films of them. They’re enormous, colorful, exotic creatures which we might easily mistake for dragons. The elaborate lion costume is shared by two dancers; one wears the massive head, and the other brings up the rear (and does the navigating when a lion exits a shop or building).

On the first day of the New Year, a few dozen of these lions romp madly through the streets of Chinatown, in pairs and trios, accompanied by their percussionists. They go into all the businesses, where the shopkeepers give them red envelopes of money—and cabbage (yes, cabbage), which the lion “chews up” and “spits out.” Being showered by flying bits of cabbage symbolizes abundance in the coming year. Lions meet in the street and jam together, they come into restaurants and greet people like dogs, and they battle fan dancers while firecrackers go off and confetti showers everyone.

It was an amazing day.

Touring the Big Apple’s neighborhoods with local guides, learning about the city’s history and culture in person, eating exotic foods, dawdling in neighborhood landmarks and museums, poking around interesting shops and local parks.... Well, yes, it’s a dirty job—but *someone’s* got to do it! My dedication to my craft knows no bounds, and thus I do not flinch from the arduous task of becoming better acquainted with the magic of the Big Apple.

*Laura Resnick’s 2012 Esther Diamond releases are Disappearing Nightly (June; reissue), set in the West Village, and Poltergeist (November), set in Midtown. The Misfortune Cookie, set in Chinatown, is scheduled for release in 2013.*

## Business Briefs

### **Bundling: Will it be a good thing and for whom?**

“Bundling” is the new buzz word in publishing, but this time the b-word means promoting print and digital titles in one package. Questions remain about the feasibility of selling both formats together: How do customers get both the print and digital copies without too much fuss or muss on their part? How will royalties work for the author when the print wholesale model is different from the digital agency model? While this idea has the industry talking, there’s been little comment from the Big Six, B&N, and Amazon.

*Publishers Weekly*

### **Open Road Media Takes on More Veterans**

Former Publisher and Editor-in-Chief for Bantam Dell Nita Taublib is Open Road’s new romance “Strategic Advisor.” Former Editor-in-Chief for Holt Marjorie Braman is Consulting Editorial Director and will work with digital originals and backlist genres.

*Publishers Lunch*

### **Moving in the Right Direction**

Third-quarter sales for BN.com were \$420 million, an increase of 32%, and the company’s total third-quarter sales were \$2.4 billion, which is an increase of 5% from last year. Sales of the Nook went up by 64% and business in the all-things-Nook category was up by 38% to \$542 million. Despite all the positive numbers, however, the company’s total net income dropped by 14%. But William Lynch, the firm’s CEO, stated that in-store traffic and sales “were the highest we’ve seen in five years” and that “physical book sales at our stores” went up by 4% from last year, although the specific number for that statistic was not released. “Digital content” sales, which include digital books, newsstand, and apps, were up by 85%.

*Barnes & Noble*



# Not Your Usual Writing Advice — Symbols

BY JOANN GROTE



Photo by Sabrina Ingram

***“Ideas have come from the strangest places.”***

— Joyce Carol Oates

Symbols are all around us; so much so that we aren’t always aware of them. Common symbols in today’s society include: the lone wolf, a money bag, a dollar sign, a rainbow, a cross, the Star of David, and the golden arches.

As writers, we use symbols in story to add depth, to add layers, and to increase a reader’s conscious and unconscious recognition of elements and character. We may research customs and cultures to find symbols common to our characters, or make the symbols up if we create our own futuristic or non-earth world.

As familiar as we are with the sight and use of symbols, most of us aren’t accustomed to recognizing natural or archetypal symbols, let alone looking to them for messages for our lives, including our writing lives. The logical business model doesn’t encourage such things.

My fascination with symbols began about 13 years ago when I started paying attention to my dreams. Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ *Women Who Run with the Wolves* introduced me to possible interpretations of dream symbols in the tradition of Carl Jung. I began to look forward to sleeping, wondering what every night would bring in stories, pictures, and possible guidance. My interest in symbols has continued to grow. I find symbols everywhere now, including the animal world, and my days often seem filled with excitement and a sense of guidance as a result.

In the February and March of 2011 and February 2012 columns, I discussed Feng Shui, which uses symbolism in various forms: different areas of a house or piece of land relating to different areas of life such as health, career, and relationships; light representing life and creative energy; and a fireplace as a symbol of creative energy, to name a few. Last month’s column discussed possible symbolism related to clutter, which can give clues to areas where change might improve our writing and our writing lives.

At the beginning of each new year, I get together with three friends to send prayers requesting assistance in certain areas of our lives for the coming year. One of my new year’s prayers this January was to discover my voice—my passion and purpose in my writing.

The night of January 1, I had two dreams that seemed to speak to the desire I’d expressed in my prayers. One dream began with me nursing a wounded dog. Then the dog transformed into a groundhog. When I woke, I looked at the symbolism of both animals. Dogs are generally tame, as was the dog in my dream, and are known for their loyalty. The dog in the dream needed healing. Groundhogs are generally wild. According to *Animal-Speak* by Tim Andrews, a groundhog symbolizes “the ability to get deep within an area of interest. It’s not unusual to appear when a new area of study is about to open up.”

I can see how these animals might relate to using my writing “voice.” I’ve written many books over the years, and writing became relatively easy, or “tame,” if you will. What I wrote served me, or was loyal to me, and I to it. But I’ve been trying to write in a new area the last year. In addition, at the October NINC conference I was reminded of a project I started years ago and never completed. Life brought changes that ▶

caused my career path to change also—slightly, but enough that I stopped working on a series about which I cared deeply. As the years passed, I'd all but forgotten the project. Between the conference and the new year, I'd been debating whether to return to the project. To pursue it would involve a lot of research—the need for “the ability to get deep within an area of interest” as the groundhog symbolizes—and the writing would be challenging compared with what I've written in the past. According to Andrews, it takes about two years for a groundhog to fully mature, and that could indicate a project may take two years to complete.

The second dream included different symbolism—people, specific writers. I was at a writers' conference that I helped plan. There were many writers at the conference, but only two whose names I recognized. One I have met. She has written nonfiction similar to nonfiction I write, but in the dream was concentrating on fiction. The other writer I've never met, I've never read her work, and didn't know what she wrote. I only knew her name from the NINC loop. After the dream, I looked up her website. We have similar backgrounds, our first books were published the same year, and she writes fiction in an area in which I'm interested in publishing, but haven't. Again, I can see the symbolism encouraging me to follow the desire to get back to the long-ago dropped project, or at least to similar writing.

I've discovered I'm not the only NINC member who watches for symbols, attempts to interpret them, and uses them to help guide my life. For NINC's prolific Charlotte Hubbard, 2011 was a packed year. “We sold a house in Missouri, and bought one in Minnesota, which entailed house-hunting trips on my part. While we were remodeling the new house, I was writing a book at a tabletop office in a very small apartment, while most of our belongings were in storage, and I was sharing one small bathroom with my husband for the first time in 30 years. In October, my sister moved in with us, and I became her driver to doctor appointments, interviews, and now to her job.” In all, during 2011, Charlotte wrote three books in a new area for her.

In a January 15, 2012 post on the NINC blog, she wrote, “As I did this morning's Tarot meditation, a habit I've revived with the new year to regain some balance in my life, I asked the question ‘How shall I focus myself today?’” She drew the Princess of Swords card—which pictures a woman holding a single sword. Tarot cards are filled with symbolism. “Basically, this Princess was telling me to remember who holds the sword when it comes to prioritizing my time: my exercise time..., the time I spend driving my sister to work, cooking, and generally holding this household together—not to mention my writing time.... While it was a gratifying accomplishment to write and write and write so I have four books coming out this year, this prolific pattern has taken its toll in other areas of my life....

“I had forgotten that the Sword is always in my hand. In the Tarot, Swords are not so much a symbol of weaponry/force as they are of reason and intellect. When you lose track of how you use your sword (or you have misplaced it and then must spend valuable time finding it again), it's a pretty sure sign that you need to get a grip and take your life in hand again.” So Charlotte did; she added back things that add balance and peace to her life.

Symbols can surprise us. I would not have thought of a sword in the terms Charlotte states, as a symbol of “reason and intellect” rather than of “weaponry” or “force.” Similarly, an interpretation of a symbol within one society or culture may not be the same interpretation given that symbol in another society or culture. For instance, I recently read in *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Feng Shui* by Lillian Too that the dragon is one of the four Celestial animals. If you read last month's column, you may remember that NINC member Dara Girard placed a dragon in her office. She said, “The sight of the dragon holding the pearl made me feel optimistic and fearless.” To some a dragon may indicate danger or overpowering strength, but according to Lillian Too, in the world of Feng Shui, the dragon represents “great good fortune,” especially if it holds a pearl. It appears Dara chose her symbol well.

Symbols are always open to interpretation. We don't necessarily always interpret them “right,” but when we watch for them, we learn to pay closer attention to possible guidance, and trust that the guidance is there in all areas of our lives—including our writing careers.

*JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 38 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children's nonfiction. Contact her at jaghi@rconnect.com.*



# WRITING is TAXING

By Diane Kelly

## Get in the Know!

The tax rules are constantly changing. As self-employed writers, we have to be familiar not only with the rules that apply to individuals, but also with the rules that apply to small businesses. We not only have to deal with federal income taxes, but we have to contend with state and local income, sales, and property taxes, too. It can be overwhelming (even to tax practitioners). What's more, if you have questions, consulting with a tax professional can be costly.

Many people feel frustrated, and rightfully so. I am regularly asked by my fellow writers where they can go to get more information or to educate themselves about taxes. Fortunately, there are some great free or inexpensive options offered by the government for taxpayers to learn more about taxes.

Where should you start? I'd suggest beginning at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). Take a look around the site and become familiar with the publications, forms, instructions, and information offered there. The latest tax news and developments are posted in the "News" section in the center of the IRS website's home page. The home page "Hot Topics" section also addresses current topics that may be of interest to you. Make a habit of checking the page regularly to keep up to date on the latest changes in tax law.

The IRS website contains a "Small Business and Self-Employed Tax Center" where you'll find information about "Small Business Events" across the United States, <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/index.html>. Live tax workshops are among resources offered. The workshops cover a wide variety of topics, including:

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|---|---------------------------------|
| Deductions                                  | Retirement plans                |
| Depreciation                                | Payment options                 |
| Home offices                                | Self-employment taxes           |
| Recordkeeping                               | Forms of business organization  |
| Estimated taxes                             | Employer identification numbers |
| Hiring employees or independent contractors |                                 |

The benefit of attending a live workshop is that you can ask questions of the instructors if any of the material is not clear to you.

While the topics vary, most live workshops last for four hours or less, so you won't be tied up all day. Some are offered at midday, so if you work a day job you may be able to use your lunch hour to attend. Many of the workshops are held at local colleges or government offices.

If you aren't able to attend a live workshop, you can access the IRS "Virtual Small Business Tax Workshop" video online at <http://www.irsvideos.gov/virtualworkshop/>. You also have the option of ordering *Publication 1066C*, which is a CD containing "A Virtual Small Business Workshop." Up to five copies of the CD can be ordered at no charge. You can't beat that! The virtual workshop provides a good, broad base of information. It may not be the most exciting video you'll ever watch, but you'll be glad you did. You'll feel much more in the know afterwards.

The IRS video portal (<http://www.irsvideos.gov/>) also contains a wealth of information for both individuals and businesses, including information about the audit process should you find yourself facing an examination. Eeek! ▶

For more online educational tools, go to: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/content/0,,id=146331,00.html>

The IRS also offers an email subscription service for self-employed/small business operators. The newsletter, which is sent out on alternate Wednesdays, provides concise, current information on topics that may be relevant to your business. A sample is available at: [http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/ensb\\_sample.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/ensb_sample.pdf). You can sign up for the Small Business e-newsletter at: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USIRS/subscriber/new>.

The IRS website also offers “Tax Trails” to lead you to information regarding individual tax issues, some of which apply to self-employed individuals.

You can access the Tax Trail at <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=132035,00.html>.

Like the IRS, many state and local tax authorities offer live or online workshops to help taxpayers learn about their tax responsibilities. Check the websites for your tax authorities to see what types of programs are available. The Small Business Administration also offers information and workshops on topics that may be of interest to you as a small business owner.

As they say, knowledge is power. Getting in the know can also reduce your anxiety about taxes and possibly save you some time and money.

*Diane Kelly is a CPA/tax attorney and the author of the Death and Taxes mystery series from St. Martin's Press.*

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## *Business Briefs*

### **More Vertical Integration: Publishers Enter the Film Industry**

Did you notice that of the nine films up for the Best Picture Award at the Oscars, six started out as books? With publishers facing increasing financial pressures from the slow economy and the rise of non-traditional competition (indie publishing, Amazon's new adventures in publishing, etc.), some are moving into the film industry. Random House and Macmillan have set up in-house film divisions that function like traditional film producers—acquiring rights and setting up development deals with studios—and the other Big Four are paying close attention. Random House launched its film division in 2005; it acquired the book and movie rights for its most successful undertaking, *One Day*, simultaneously and the book's release coincided—not coincidentally—with the beginning of filming. The book was released in 2009 and the film in 2011. The unit has two films scheduled to begin production in 2012. Macmillan's best-known book-to-film project is the young-adult, time travel tale *Tempest* by Julie Cross.

RH and Macmillan are not leaving book-to-TV options out of the picture, either. A television show based on Macmillan's upcoming *Prep School Confidential* is in development, as is *SEAL Team 666*, described as “a supernatural spin on the popular Special Ops team.” The magazine conglomerate Condé Nast is also getting into the act, and has created Condé Nast Entertainment to develop content in its publications into film and television projects.

*The Hollywood Reporter*