



novelists  
inc.

NINK

JUNE 2017

Volume 28, Number 6

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

# *Nink* June 2017

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# President's Voice

*By Erica Ridley*



Happy June!

This is shaping up to be a whirlwind summer for me. Three weeks ago, I flew from Costa Rica to the U.S., where I have already bounced between six different states for various functions, including watching my youngest brother graduate with a doctorate in chemical engineering.

Last week, my eldest nephew and I head to Washington, D.C. for the week to celebrate his high school graduation. And next week, when I finally return home to Costa Rica, two of my youngest nephews will be coming with me, breaking in their brand new passports. They have been promised a fortnight full of sloths, hot springs, volcanos, and monkeys.

Aunt of the Year? Looking good.

Status of overdue manuscript? Uh... It's starting to look like I had a "Hold my beer!" moment when I agreed to back-to-back family shenanigans on top of an aggressive publishing schedule. But hey, who needs sleep?

## **Latest NINC News:**

We are looking for a few good souls to join the technology committee! Know a thing or two about the internet? Join the fun [here](#)!

NINC has added a new partnership with Publisher's Weekly to our Member Benefits. Details below, and complete details on our [website](#).

[Registration](#) for the 2017 NINC Conference: Discovery is filling up fast. This year is going to be great! We've got several fabulous speakers lined up already, and even more that are yet to be announced.

A few highlights include:

- Editorial director Cheryl Klein, author of *Second Sight: An Editor's Talks on Writing, Revising, and Publishing Books for Children and Young Adults*, and one of the editors for Harry Potter
- Chris Fox, novelist and bestselling author of *Write to Market* and *5,000 Words per Hour*
- Newsletter and promotional expert, Ryan Zee, of BookSweeps

- David Gaughran, author of Let's Get Digital and Let's Get Visible
- Writer, editor, and journalist Nisi Shawl, who teaches about fantasy in fiction and real-world diversity
- Sean Platt and Johnny B Truant, hosts of the Self Publishing Podcast and authors of Write. Publish. Repeat.
- From Midlist to Mad Money, presented by NINC's own Roxanne St. Claire and Kristen Painter

Get the [latest conference news here](#).

## 2017 NINC Conference: Discovery

To register, please LOG IN and visit the [conference registration page](#).

The important [Conference FAQ](#) can be found here, and also find [hotel information](#).

## Limited time Publishers Weekly discount!

We have arranged special discount rates for active novelists inc. members. At any time, you can use the member resource center to get a Publishers Weekly subscription for just \$174.99 for a print + digital + online subscription or just \$154.99 for a digital + online subscription.

To kick-off our new partnership, PW has agreed to extend a special discount invitation to our members. Simply RSVP by July 14 to become a PW Publishing Insider for just \$99 and get a full year of PW in your preferred format.

After that time, you can still sign-up at our reduced member rate.

Publishing insider's benefits:

- Weekly print issues: 175+ prepublication book reviews in every issue and industry news.
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- Announcements issues: Spring & Fall Children's & Adult roundups of what's coming.
- "Subscriber-only" online access: expanded best-sellers lists, 200,000 book reviews, and more.

Respond by July 14, 2017 for the \$99 special rate. The rate is reserved for active NINC members. If you have any questions about this offer or your subscription please contact PW Subscriber Services at [pw@pubservice.com](mailto:pw@pubservice.com) or 800-278-2991 between 5 a.m. and 5 p.m. Pacific.

## Even more NINC Member Benefits

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already. The [Pro Services Directory](#), member [discount page](#), and [sample letters](#) are also great resources.

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#). You can also [propose an article](#), submit a [letter to the editor](#), or volunteer to [be an assistant editor](#) and become part of the team. You can also [buy a paperback copy](#) of the 2016 Best of Nink!

## Accessing the NINC Website



Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the [login page](#). Your username is your email address, and your password was sent to you in an email with subject line “NINC: New website for renewals & more!”

If you didn't see it, be sure to check your Spam folder, or email [webmaster@ninc.com](mailto:webmaster@ninc.com) and we will reset your password for you.

Thank you!



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*Erica Ridley is a New York Times and USA Today best-selling author of historical romance novels. Her latest series, The Dukes of War, features roguish peers and dashing war heroes who return from battle only to be thrust into the splendor and madness of Regency England. When not reading or writing romances, Erica can be found riding camels in Africa, zip-lining through rain forests in Costa Rica, or getting hopelessly lost in the middle of Budapest.*

# Go Beyond the Flow

## A guide to writing glide

*By Jim Thomsen*



We often talk about making sentences and stories “flow.” The word makes for a neat little image in our heads, of words bobbing in an orderly fashion atop a swift current, but it’s hard to articulate precisely because it gets used so often and so loosely as to see its meaning degenerate into mush.

Ask yourself: Can you define flow without tripping over your words (and thus stripping the flow from your sentences)? I can’t. I can stumble over myself and talk about “rhythm” and “pacing” and “music” until I throw up my hands in red-faced frustration, but have I really gotten at it?

I might be better able to articulate what flow is not: “Sentences that backtrack on themselves with snakes’ nests of clauses and intrusive punctuation like em-dashes and parentheses and semicolons, sentences that build walls around themselves to prop up their overstuffed structures.”

There’s more to it, having to do with varying the length of sentences for maximum syntactical pleasure, and you can read more about it in [this excellent Writer’s Digest article](#).

Does that help? Maybe, but it’s incomplete, because it deals with sentences but not so much with story. Sentences are the vehicle, but story is still the driver, and both have to hug those hairpin curves, haul ass on the highway, and handle heavy traffic with equal skill and style.

In past essays, I’ve quoted from the work of my favorite writing teacher, [James Scott Bell](#), who often says that every passage and page of any given story should be infused with “pleasurable uncertainty.” That means that sentences should not only flow, but flow in such a way that makes the ride on top of them a delight no matter how dark the material might be.

I have my own term for this marriage of flow and pleasurable uncertainty: glide.

I’ll illustrate it through one of my favorite examples from one of my favorite authors, Stephen King. This is from his novel *Cujo*:

She began to shift Tad into the back, grunting and puffing, fighting the waves of dizziness that made her sight gray over. Finally he was in the hatchback, as silent and still

as a sack of grain. She looked out his window, saw the baseball bat lying in the high grass, and opened the door. In the dark mouth of the garage, Cujo stood up and began to advance slowly, head lowered, down the crushed gravel toward her.

It was twelve thirty when Donna Trenton stepped out of her Pinto for the last time.

OK, this is a bit unfair because Stephen King is a god and we are mere mortals, but it's still instructive. The sentences flow, but the passage has glide. Why? Because we're so swept up in the smoothness of this sentence-to-sentence ride that we don't realize we're about to sail right off the cliff of the story. And then a thrill shoots through the stomach and ... well, we just have to go over, don't we? This shows how glide can be defined by a simple question: Do you absolutely have to know what happens next?

We tend to give too much credit to the story when answering that, but the sentences should not be overlooked. They build suspense incrementally, and within themselves. They each ask urgent questions: Why is she dizzy? Why is her son too still? What does the baseball bat represent? What does the dog want?

And that last sentence, one that gives me shivers of sheer dark delight every time I read it, practically screams at us: What's next? TELL ME NOW!

Of course, not every passage and page in a novel can be a cliffhanger. A story consists of quiet moments, bridging material, reflection, exposition—all the not-so-sexy building blocks of story. And moments of action, which in unskilled hands can become exercises in stage direction. Consider this passage from the draft of a novel manuscript on which I worked several years ago:

She ran into the cabin—she knew it was a mistake but she couldn't think of anywhere else to go with the hills behind her and a sheer drop to her right—and spotted him near the left wall. He stepped toward her and she ran for the far side toward the corner, then dodged to the opposite side as he lunged. She spun toward the window, away from his angling arms—the fingers brushed the heel of her left shoe as she looked wildly for a back entrance somewhere behind her—and fell across a chair about six feet away from the table in the center of the room.

Follow that? Neither did I.

How would you suggest the author rewrite this? Before tackling that, consider the nature of action itself from your own point of view. Let's say you're being pursued by a bad guy. Are you taking stock of the spatial relationships between every element of your surroundings?

I submit you're not, that your thoughts are more impressionistic, and if you render the actions as jumbled series of blurry impressions, you can adhere to the principle of glide while still showing a coherently rendered series of motions.

Here's a passage from one of my favorite practitioners of glide, a suspense/thriller author named [Peter Abrahams](#), from his novel *End Of Story*:

I feel his hard muzzle at the back of my head. Am I expecting company? No. That explains my overreaction and I don't even recognize Ferdie till he's down. Course he has backup—procedure is how they get control of the wild boys—and they work me over for a

bit, completely understandable, no problem. Then Ferdie's back in the picture, a little different with missing teeth. One of them's in my hand; I've been clinging to it during the working-me-over-part for some reason. Ferdie asks the big question, the one about where the money is. I can only laugh.

And yes, this works just as well with a more distanced third-person approach. Here we see Abrahams spelling out how impressionism in action can be rendered in words. From Abrahams's novel *A Perfect Crime*:

This beefy guy came in with the baseball bat. The panic inside Whitey was a screaming gusher from deep in his chest, boiling up and spraying red in his brain. It took away visual continuity, leaving Whitey with a few strobe-lit impressions: the beefy guy going down, the bat now in his hands, blood here and there, are you ready for high definition? And then he was out the door and in the street.

Think of how impressionism can—and, I submit, should—be applied to sex scenes. We've probably all read too many sex scenes that read like IKEA assembly instructions—insert Tab A into Slot B—with their tiresome euphemisms: length, core, manhood, center.

Instead, think of (good) sex as I suspect most of us actually experience it: a tangle of limbs, pressure, release, breath, sweat, darkness, blurriness, surge, light, etc., all building and ebbing in intensity.

Why flatten that with stage directions: "I grabbed X and lowered it to Y as she stroked Z and ...."? That's got about as much flow as ... well, not-good sex.

Sex and glide, though? Different story, I submit.

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# The Mad Scribbler

## Puppy Post Mortem

*By Laura Resnick*



*“Some people think this ceaseless barrage of feuding and hysterics will finally end when the 2015 Hugo winners are announced on the night of August 22, but I think those people are obviously suffering from oxygen deprivation. Whatever the voting results, they will be analyzed, dissected, parsed, challenged, and fought over for months afterward.”*

*—Laura Resnick, prescient Nink columnist, July 2015*

Two years ago, I wrote here about Puppygate, the noisy and volatile controversy that was splintering the science fiction/fantasy community into bitterly quarreling factions.

(I know what you’re thinking: “A big quarrel among SF/F writers? Oh, my! Next, you’ll tell us that Earth is the third planet from the sun.”)

We now seem to be approaching the resolution of that story, at long last.

Puppygate is a public and highly disruptive quarrel over the Hugo Awards, which are the best known and most prestigious awards in the SF/F genre. The Hugos are administered by the World Science Fiction Society (a fannish group, not a writers’ organization) and given out at a big ceremony every year at the World Science Fiction Convention (WorldCon).

Any sentient being, as well as the not-so-sentient, can pay a fee to vote on the Hugos; most of the time, though, only dedicated fans and members of the SF/F community do so.

The years-long feud over the Hugo Awards has been so intense that various people have described it as a battle for the very soul of the science fiction genre. Personal friendships and professional relationships have disintegrated over the Puppy mess. People have been harassed online and in person, privately threatened, and publicly humiliated in the context of this feud.

Puppygate has been extensively covered by media companies such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Slate* magazine, Gawker, the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, and Salon. The coverage continues well into 2017; *Forbes* and *Wired* both recently ran feature stories about the controversy.

The ludicrous name, Puppygate, derives from two related factions, with some crossover

among their followers, who named their groups, respectively, the Sad Puppies and the Rabid Puppies. The names were inspired by a side-splitting witticism urging fans to end “puppy related sadness” by giving a Hugo Award to the writer who founded the Sad Puppies in 2013 (because “every time a tedious, boring, or otherwise ‘literary’ piece of barely science-fiction wins an award, somewhere, puppies cry”).

The ongoing quarrel has thrived on artistic arguments (such as the comment I’ve just quoted), political justifications, and “culture war” rationales. However, I’ve thought all along that these were just window-dressing for much more basic, self-interested impulses. Since its inception, I have seen the Puppy mess as being about writers who were filled with envy and resentment, and who discovered that giving vent to such feelings in public attracted a lot of attention, support, and enthusiasm from some people.

Of course, such behavior also attracts criticism, disdain, and ridicule from others.

The core aspect of Puppygate, however, is not a battle of words, wits, and wills; rather, it is the enormous influence that the Puppies had on the Hugo nominations process in 2015 and 2016, due to block voting based on the two slates publicly posted by the two faction leaders (the Puppies reject this account of their actions; but if I have to detail their explanations, I will start gibbering, so we’ll leave it at that). Roughly five dozen of the nominees—the majority of the Hugo ballot—were Puppy picks in 2015, for example.

Because there were real-world consequences, rather than merely online posturing, Puppygate grew to involve an unusually large portion of the SF/F community, including writers, readers, bloggers, convention volunteers, publishers, editors, and people outside the community (including those who don’t seem to know what a Hugo Award is, but who are nonetheless keen to join a fight).

Naturally, the feud has included the usual suspects, people who are often at the center of various brawls in the SF/F world. Additionally, people who typically eschew public quarrels also got involved, including some high-profile writers—people whose names you’d recognize even if your interest in SF/F is similar to my interest in football (I know it’s a sport involving men in tight pants who fight over a strangely shaped ball, and that’s about it).

Indeed, it became almost impossible to be left out of the perpetual squabbles and scandals that characterize Puppygate, so irrationally and unpredictably did the controversy unfold, unfurl, and infect.

People who wanted no part of any of this became the target of enraged blog posts and scathing debates because they had won a Hugo in the past, as well as because they had *not* won a Hugo in the past. People who had no interest in this quarrel (and who had sometimes never even heard of the Puppies) found themselves under pressure to withdraw—as well as *not* to withdraw—from the Hugo ballots in 2015 and 2016 because the Puppies had slated their nomination.

The multi-directional quarrel eventually inspired the two Puppy factions, Sad and Rabid, to boycott the biggest publisher in SF/F, Tor Books (a division of Macmillan) after their demands were not met.

Those demands, which still have not been met two years later, were that certain people who had said negative things about the Puppies and who were associated with Tor must be

reprimanded and/or fired (there was not uniform agreement among the Puppies about what actions would satisfy them and end their boycott). The list of those who must be punished for disrespecting the Puppies included Tor's longtime art director, a couple of senior editors, and a bestselling novelist with whom Tor had recently signed a seven-figure deal.

As entropy took over and things got even stranger, one disenchanted Puppy who wrote for Tor Books publicly declared he would not deliver another book to Tor until/unless a specific Tor editor (not his own, as it happens) went to Confession and took Communion.

That demand has also not been met as of this writing.

Anyhow, the SF/F community responded in several ways to the Puppies manipulating the Hugo nominations (again: the Puppies reject the assertion that they did so). After the 2015 ballot was published, a record number of people registered to vote in the Hugo Awards. The upshot was that no Puppy nominee won a Hugo, not even in categories where all the nominees were Puppy picks.

This was possible because one ballot slot in every Hugo category is always occupied by "No Award." And No Award (sometimes also called "Noah Ward") won five Hugos in 2015; the rest of the trophies went home with nominees who got on the ballot despite the Puppies, rather than because of them.

This rejection of gaming the nominations process (insert ritual Puppy denial here) was emphatic, particularly since nearly everyone agreed that some nominees who lost to "No Award" would have gotten a Hugo that night based on merit alone, but they were voted down specifically because their names were on the Puppy slates.

The Puppies expressed anger about this and about the No Awards, they cast aspersions on voters, and they belittled the value of the Hugos. They also suggested that there had been either incompetence or impropriety in the counting of the final ballots. (Hugo ballot counts are published as soon as the ceremony is over. This may be in the interests of transparency, or possibly just to humor obsessive-compulsive fans and writers.)

The general SF/F community was more proactive the following year about engaging in the nominations process, while the Sad Puppies were meanwhile more casual about it. The Rabid Puppies still got a large number of nominees on the ballot, but their picks again did not win any awards.

Meanwhile, math geeks and data wizards in the community were working on ideas to shore up the weakness in the Hugo nominations process which the Puppies had exploited (Puppy Denial™) before others followed suit and the awards turned into a block-voting football.

A modification called "E Pluribus Hugo" was implemented for the 2017 Hugos. Having read several articles and reports about how it works, I still don't understand it (did I mention that I am not a math wiz?), but it's a method of tabulating votes that mitigates the effects of block voting in the nominations process.

This has coincided, as it happens, with the Sad Puppies apparently evaporating; there has been no activity from them this year. The Rabid Puppies are still around, and they recently got a number of nominees onto the 2017 ballot; but thanks to "E Pluribus Hugo," it's far, far fewer than in the past couple of years.

More measures are being discussed for fine-tuning the way nominations are tallied, in view of these experiences, and it is meanwhile hoped that the remaining Puppies will get bored and move on.

So there isn't a satisfying climax and ending to the Puppy story, but there is at least a resolution to the main plot-problem. The Hugo Awards have emerged intact from a mess that led some to question whether they would remain the genre's most prestigious prize. As of today, it looks like Hugo will hold the line.

When I reflect on these events, which consumed much of the SF/F community for a long time, I always come back to the comments I heard over and over from bemused NINC members who read my first column about Puppygate two years ago, as the controversy was evolving daily.

The questions were so predictably NINC-like, and a good example of why I value my membership in this organization:

- "How does pursuing this quarrel over the Hugo Awards help the Puppies' book sales?"
- "How does spending time on this feud improve their craft or productivity as writers?"
- "How do they see boycotting a publisher or verbally attacking editors as helping their writing careers?"

How, indeed?

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*Fantasy writer Laura Resnick is the author of the Esther Diamond series, the Silerian Trilogy, and many short stories.*



*Founded in 1989*

### **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.

### **Founders**

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

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## 2017 Committees

- [Complete committee member listings](#) are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.
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## Central Coordinator

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*Address changes may be made on the website. Members without internet access may send changes to the Central Coordinator.*

## **Nink Newsletter**

June 2017 edition – Vol. 28, No. 5

Copy editor: Cynthia Moyer

To request reprint rights or to submit an article proposal, please contact [the editor](#).

Publication: 10 to 12 issues annually. Available in PDF, mobi and epub formats. Public issues redact NINC members-only information. To change subscription preferences, please contact [admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com).

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