



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



novelists,
inc.

VOLUME 30 : NUMBER 9
SEPTEMBER 2019

Nink September 2019

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President's Voice

By Wayne Stinnett



September has arrived. Days are getting shorter and in some places, a little cooler. Kids are back in school and the house is quiet. Here in Beaufort, SC, I've been working on our new sailboat, *Write of Passage*, getting it ready to sail. It's new, but still needs a lot of things. Mostly these are things I chose to do myself, or hire someone to do for me, just to save a few dollars over having the manufacturer do it. We've spent the night aboard a couple of times and have sailed to such far away places as the fuel dock and St. Helena Sound. As that work continues, it's time to turn my full attention to the NINC conference.

What? You didn't know that it's less than three weeks away? Time flies when you're having fun, and as jobs go, I think ours is one of the most enjoyable occupations a person can have. Think about it; every day someone picks up a book that we've written and gets lost wandering through our imaginings as we lead them on a guided tour of our make-believe world.

This year's conference will be fantastic! Alyssa and the program committee have a wonderful lineup of speakers and industry guests, who will bring you the latest information about our chosen profession, changes that are happening, what's working, and things that are on the horizon.

If you're unable to attend, don't fret. We will have reporters in every workshop and discussion—all but the Night Owls. These volunteers will do more than take notes that interest them. They will try to capture, in writing, the whole presentation to which they are assigned. Their reports will begin to appear in the November issue of the *Nink* newsletter and will probably run into early 2020. Also, keep an eye on the NINC Facebook page for occasional behind-the-scenes snapshots of our members enjoying the conference.

Speaking of 2020, have you voted for who you want to lead NINC next year? There is still time to cast your ballot. Just go to www.ninc.com and sign in. Then go to <https://ninc.com/members-only/vote/> and make your voice heard.

As I mentioned in a previous column, this year we will have our first-ever trade show, with tables set up in the Bird Key conference room where dozens of industry guests will highlight the newest and coolest innovations in the writing and publishing industry. If you are attending, you definitely want to make time for this.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the many sponsors to this year's conference. NINC has become totally self-sufficient, and these organizations help offset some of the cost, allowing us to provide an even better experience for our members. Many thanks to Amazon, KDP, ACX, Draft2Digital, BookBub, Vellum, Kobo, Reedsy, BookFunnel, and Self Publishing Formula for their generous contributions. We hope y'all have a great time with us this year.

Now, start packing! We're going to the beach!

—Wayne Stinnett, President
wayne@waynestinnett.com

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](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

Accessing the NINC Website

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>

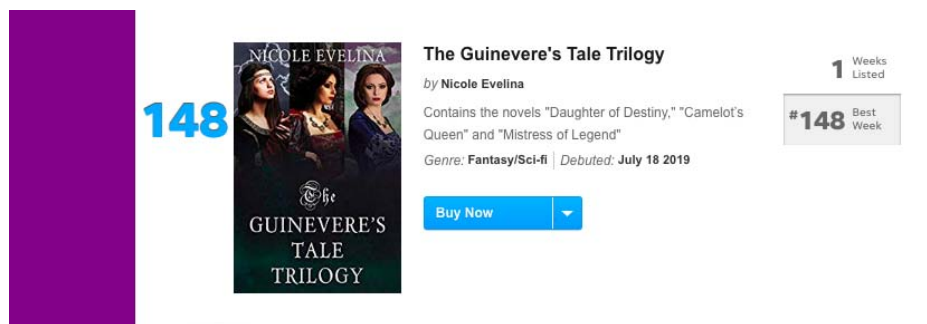
Wayne Stinnett writes your typical murder and mayhem in paradise. His characters and plots come from real people and situations he's encountered, fictionalized to protect the guilty.

How to Hit the *USA Today* Bestseller List with a Single-Author Boxed-Set

By Nicole Evelina



Last month, one of my biggest dreams as an indie author came true: I hit the *USA Today* bestseller list with my boxed set, *The Guinevere's Tale Trilogy*.



And you can, too. It only takes a little time, money, planning, and a willingness to promote the hell out of yourself.

I'm going to share with you exactly what I did in case you are interested in trying it. This method is not the only one by any means, but it is time-tested and many authors have used it with success. (You can Google "how to hit the *USA Today* bestseller list" and you'll find similar articles by others who have used this method.) Of course, you'll want to adjust it to your own needs and budget.

A bit about the *USA Today* bestseller list

Each of the bestseller lists is a little different, but *USA Today* counts sales from Monday to Sunday, so you would want your promotion to mirror this. As the name of the publication implies, only sales in the United States count toward their list. The number of sales you need

varies, but the general advice is 5,000-9,000, though I hit the low end of the list with 4,191. The number depends on the time of the year because there are busy and slow periods in publishing just like in any other industry. But the good news is pre-sales count if you are trying to hit the list with a new book. The general rule is that you need at least 500 sales at Barnes & Noble and iBooks in order to make a list, so you can't try if you are Amazon exclusive. There is debate about whether that 500 is combined or separate or if it is even accurate; some people say the real number is closer to 150 or 200. The point is you need a mix of sales—*USA Today* won't count you if you are Amazon-exclusive.

My sales by the numbers

I'm listing these early in the post so you can see what I achieved with the method outlined below.

- **Total sales:** 4,191
- **Estimated Total Income** = \$2,136.30
- **Estimated Expenses** = \$2,442.40
 - \$1,672.00 (newsletter ads)
 - \$ 761.40 (social media ads)
 - \$ 9.00 (graphics)
- **Estimated Total Loss** = \$306.10

It doesn't bother me that I lost a little money on this. Profit was not my endgame. My goal was to hit the list and I did. You may feel differently and that is totally fine.

Breakdown by retailer

- **Amazon** = 3,574 ebooks (and five print books, but those don't count toward the list)
- **Barnes & Noble** = 298
 - Nook Press = 6 (I had issues with them not changing prices on all links to the book, so that is why it is low)
 - Distributed through Smashwords = 283
 - Distributed through Draft2Digital = 9 (I don't use them like I should)
- **Apple**
 - Distributed through Smashwords = 224 (I have yet to go direct with them, but I should)
- **Kobo**
 - Distributed through Smashwords = 91
- **Smashwords** = 5

(**Google Play** was not included because they never lowered my price.)

My category rankings

Barnes & Noble

- #1 in fantasy
 - Held for 2.5 days
- In top 15 for 4 days
- Bestseller status for 5 days
- #11 in ALL Nook ebooks
- In Top 100 for 3 days

Amazon

- #1 in three subcategories on Amazon
 - Held for 2.5 days
- #4 in Fantasy on Amazon
 - Held for 2 days
- #5 in Sci-fi and Fantasy on Amazon
 - Held for 2 days
- #40 in ALL Kindle ebooks
- In Top 100 for 2.5 days

Apple

- #8 in Sci-fi and Fantasy on iBooks (I only thought to look at this on Sunday, so I'm not sure if it was any higher. It likely was at least on Thursday.)

Smashwords

- Made their Hot List two weeks in a row.
 - Week 1
 - #1 selling book
 - #1 selling boxed set
 - #1 selling fantasy boxed set
 - #1 in fantasy
 - #1 in fairy tales
 - Week 2 (this is with it back at full price)
 - #4 selling boxed set
 - #1 selling fantasy boxed set
 - #1 in fairy tales
 - Was still a bestselling book on the third week in boxed sets.

BookBub is key

You can try the other elements described below without a BookBub U.S. Featured Deal, but unless you already have a huge audience, I wouldn't recommend it. BookBub is expensive, but very powerful. They say most authors average about 3,000-4,000 in sales from one of these

deals, but that depends on the [category](#) you are in. (I was in fantasy, where they say the average is 2,100. My numbers were just above that at about 2,500.) In my experience, if you want a U.S. deal (which is where the vast majority of subscribers are) **don't** click both U.S. and international, even though they say it increases your chances. Every time I've clicked both, I've gotten international only. While that is good for increasing sales and establishing greater foreign readership, a U.S. deal is what gives you the chance to make a list. This was the first time I indicated I only wanted a U.S. deal, and the first time I got one.

When you are submitting for a deal, unless you are published by a major house, the general advice is to focus on your ebook only. This is partly because of the costs involved in printing paperbacks, which limit how far indie authors can reduce our prices before we lose money on a sale. It is also because many of the lists count paperback and ebook sales separately, so focusing on both won't actually increase your chances. Plus, most readers of these newsletters are buying ebooks anyway. (I did find that I saw a slight increase in paperback sales during the campaign even though that book wasn't on sale, so you may see the same benefit.)

When thinking about your potential deal, there are two big decisions you have to make: which book and what price? As for which book, it is easier to make the list with a boxed set (either of your own books like I did with the *Guinevere's Tale Trilogy* or with a set from various authors who have established fan bases) than it is with a single book. This is because readers feel like they are getting greater value when they get more than one book at a sale price.

Another fairly big decision is which genre to advertise in. [BookBub only has so many choices](#) so you have to decide which best fits your book and its potential readers. If your genre is straightforward, like contemporary romance, it will be an easy decision because they have that as a category—and it is a very popular one. However, *The Guinevere's Tale Trilogy* is historical fantasy and they don't have a category for that, so I had to choose between historical romance (which it is not), historical fiction, and fantasy. I've learned from previous experience that my Guinevere books sell better when I market them as fantasy, so that is the category I went with, even though historical fiction has a bigger BookBub audience.

Marketing expert Amy Collins told me once that the bigger the price drop you can demonstrate for BookBub, the more likely you are to get a featured deal. How far you choose to drop it depends on your goals for your campaign. If you are looking to make money (or at least break even), you may not wish to go all the way down to \$0.99 like I did. (My normal price is \$9.99.) However, if you don't care about a profit and are just looking to try to make a list, as I was, drop the price down as much as you are comfortable. But don't do free because many of the lists don't count books offered for free.

Rumor has it Tuesday and Wednesday are the best days for BookBub deals because you can then ride the "tail" from the ad for the rest of the week. Mine was on a Thursday, and I did just fine. My sales dropped off pretty quickly Saturday and Sunday, so for me, the tail wasn't as long as some had led me to believe. If you don't like the day/date that BookBub gives you, just email them (quickly—their rules say it has to be a certain amount of time before your deal) and they will change it. Mine was originally on a Saturday and I asked them to change it because I was traveling and also asked for a different day based on when other major advertisers had open slots.

You Got a Featured Deal, Now What?

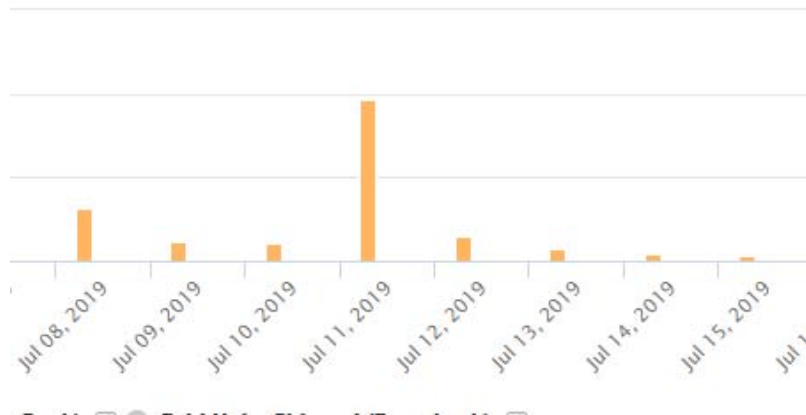
Ad stacking for newsletter lists

The first thing you should do when you find out that you got a BookBub Featured Deal (besides celebrate) is start planning the other ads you are going to run in the week of your promotion. These are usually mostly ads targeted at newsletters/mailling lists of readers. Some of the really popular ones (especially [Robin Reads](#) and [Fussy Librarian](#)) fill up a month in advance, so keep that in mind when confirming your BookBub date. Also keep in mind that some of these sites are **very** expensive. Don't feel bad if you can't afford them. I went into debt for this and I don't advise anyone else to do so. Below are ones I used, along with the price, which of course, they can change at any time. Some of them are flat-rate pricing and some let you choose what package you want. Here's a [great database](#) from Reedsy to use to evaluate potential ad companies.

Location	Date	Cost
BookBub	Thurs 7/11	\$516
Just Kindle Books	Wed 7/10	\$53
Fussy Librarian	Tuesday 7/9	\$20
Book Gorilla	unknown	free, part of a package with another company
BargainBooksy	Wed 7/10	\$40
ManyBooks	Wed 7/10	\$78
Robinreads	Mon 7/8	\$85
ENT	Tues 7/9	\$35
Choosey Bookworm	Mon 7/8	\$36
Kindle Nation Daily	Week	\$119
BooksButterfly	6/8-6/12	\$190
BookRebel	Mon 7/8	\$25
Riffle Select	Wed 7/10	\$75
Early Bird Books	Mon 7/8	\$300
The Portalist	Wed 7/10	\$100
Total		\$1,672

The best advice I can give is to cluster ads from these types of companies around your BookBub ad, preferably **before** the day of your Featured Deal. Don't run other ads on the day of your BookBub Featured Deal; just let it do its job on its own. It is better to get some heavy hitters in before your BookBub deal so that they jump-start your sales and trip Amazon's algorithms into paying attention. That way your book is primed for the big BookBub day.

Based on my sales, the promotions that seem to have done the best are the ones I scheduled on Monday (Robin Reads, [Bookrebel](#), [Early Bird Books](#)), as I had 625 sales that day, as opposed to 227 on Tuesday and 220 on Wednesday. I'm only using Amazon as my example because they have the easiest report by day but my sales at other locations showed a similar pattern.



It is important to continue to advertise after your Book Bub deal. You can do this through ads from the places above and/or through your own ads. I had scheduled all of my ads with other companies earlier in the week, so I relied upon Facebook/Instagram, Amazon, and BookBub ads that I created during the last four days of my campaign (Friday-Sunday). My sales reflected that as they trended steadily downward. I will go into more detail on the ads I created myself below.

Theme

When you're planning your campaign, you need to think like a marketer. This means:

- Being consistent in your messaging through all of your graphics and other communications.
- Keeping your color scheme and fonts consistent as well.
- Having a theme to tie together your copy and images.
- Using images that are professional (I recommend stock photography from iStock, Adobe Stock, or some other paid site) and that are consistent.
- Using comparison titles to help readers understand what type of book you're promoting.

You can choose to base your theme around anything—perhaps an upcoming holiday, season, news event, TV show or movie that your books are similar to—as long as it gives your audience something to identify with and as well as a clear, honest picture of what to expect from your book.

I chose to target the “show hole” left behind by the end of *Game of Thrones* because my Guinevere books have a lot of similar attributes (political conniving and maneuvering, murder

for the sake of gain, a quasi-medieval setting, and a bit of magic). I also played off the idea that, in the TV show at least, the women did not fare well, but they do in my books. This also ties nicely into the resurgence feminism is having at the moment. I also wanted to touch on the idea that fans have waited a long time for *The Winds of Winter* and still have a long wait, so they can use that time to read my book.

Once I saw how the various messages performed (more on that below) and I had some solid success to back up revising my ads (this was on Friday after the big BookBub push), I decided to keep the basic graphics and message the same, but change them a little to play on the books' new bestseller status and create a sense of FOMO (fear of missing out), since the campaign was coming to an end.

Graphics

Once I had those basic ideas in mind, I created eight graphics that I would both use as the basis for my Facebook/Instagram and BookBub ads and share on social media. The reason two were similar is I wanted to see which type of background connected better with people, simple or complex. Four played heavily on the *Game of Thrones* theme:



But I knew not all my readers were fans of the show, so I didn't want to put all my eggs in one basket. I also created an ad that appealed more to readers of historical fantasy, one for readers of epic fantasy, one that emphasized the award the book recently won, and one to those who are attracted to the romance in my books.



I use [Canva](#) to create my graphics. I've tried [Bookbrush](#), but I can't get it to work correctly for me. (Some people swear by it, so use whatever you are comfortable with). All of my images either come from Canva or Adobe Stock. (It is very important to use legally purchased images. Yes, it costs money, but it's better than getting yourself sued for something you stole off of Google.) I don't have any special graphic design training, so don't feel like you have to be a professional to do this.

Once the BookBub deal happened and I had several things to crow about, I edited my graphics. You'll notice the bestseller seals (which I created myself, based off of things I had seen others do). They aren't on every image and I don't always include all three because sometimes that made the design too busy. I let the ad dictate what I did and did not include. Also note the

change in language. It is simpler and uses terms like “Buy now!” “Don’t Miss Out!” and “Hurry!” to create a sense of urgency and FOMO. These graphics also emphasize the end date more, which is both a helpful reminder for people and another way to emphasize this is a limited time offer.



Prep work

There are a few things it would be wise to do before your promotion week:

- **Make sure your book page is properly formatted on all sites.** You'd be surprised how messed up they can get, especially on Amazon (their editor follows no known HTML logic) and Barnes & Noble (which I never did get fixed, despite multiple attempts).
- **Check your Amazon categories.** Amazon is always adding new categories, so if you haven't checked yours lately, you might want to shift them around. It is easier to hit #1 in a smaller, more niche sub-category. But I actually took my book out of the Arthurian niche sub-category and put it into the bigger historical fantasy category because I wanted to see how it did. My two categories are Fiction > Fantasy > Epic and Fiction > Fantasy > Historical.

- **Check your Amazon keywords.** These are how Amazon will throw you into a third category, so make sure your keywords really reflect what your book is about. This is how I got into the Sword and Sorcery subcategory.
- **Get any typos fixed** that you or readers have identified and be sure to upload the new files in plenty of time before your sale.
- **Start your sale early.** Lower your price at least 3-4 days in advance at all retailers. I did this and still had problems with NookPress and Google Play not lowering correctly.
- **Double check your links.** When you put your retailer links into the forms for your ads, save which ones you used. One or two nights before your sale, check them **all** to make sure they are reflecting the sale price—especially if you use distributors. I had a rogue Barnes & Noble link that was removed from a major newsletter because the price didn't drop with that link, even though it did with all the others I checked. By the time they told me there was a problem, the newsletter had already gone out and they refused to send the correct link. I will always wonder how many sales I missed out on because of that stupid link.

I also did a few other things that are totally optional:

- I asked on Facebook if any of my author friends had a newsletter timed to the sale and would be willing to mention it. From that, I got nine people who said they were willing to share anything I posted on Facebook, a suggestion for someone to contact who might help, a newsletter swap with one fairly big-name author and an interview and newsletter mention from a marketing expert. This is something I would totally do again. The worst people can do is ignore you or say no.
- I was heading to the Historical Novel Society Conference just a few weeks before the sale and I knew they would have a swag table so I had 25 small cards printed advertising the sale. I didn't count how many were left after the conference (a lot) but I needed something to do with them. So I handed them out to people I knew at my day job. I have no way of knowing how many people actually bought the book from the card, but as several of my co-workers said, "Hey, if we can ask you to buy cookies and pizza for our kids, you can certainly ask us to buy a \$0.99 book." I would advise checking on your company's solicitation policy if you're going to do this, just to be safe. It was fun, but it's not something I think I would do again.

Newsletters/blogs

Another important step is to email your newsletter subscribers and if you have a blog, write a blog post letting people know about the sale, **your desire to hit the list** (don't be shy about this!) and how they can help you. The messages can be pretty much the same. I would advise making your story as personal as possible. After all, if you're going to ask people to help make a dream come true, it's only fair that they understand why this is your dream.

Because I changed newsletter providers, I don't have access to the email I sent to my newsletter subscribers, but here's the [post that I did on my blog](#). It's a little longer than I would recommend, but the important things are:

1. Include your buy links up front so people don't have to look for them.
2. Bold the key messages for those who will skim.
3. Provide more detail toward the bottom for those who want it.
4. Say thank you. After all, you can't make a list on your own; you are reliant on people buying the books and spreading the word.

You may also want to send a reminder close to the end of the sale period and/or provide updates along the way. This is especially good if you are doing interviews or writing articles to try to attract attention to the campaign. It gives you (and your fans) more things to share online, too.

Also, if you are part of any group blogs, make sure you post to those as well! They will reach different audiences.

Street Team

If you have a Street Team—a group of dedicated superfans who have promised to help promote your books—even a small one (mine is only 29 people), make sure you let them know about the sale and provide them with resources to help tell people about it. I created [a page on my website](#) with ready-made graphics for Facebook and Instagram, as well as tweets that could be copy/pasted. I included this link in all my communications with them via email and in our secret Facebook group. The idea is to make sharing your information as easy as possible for them. (When I updated my graphics, I created [another page](#) and let everyone know about the updated information.)

I also invited my street team members to share suggestions in the Facebook group for how to keep up interest over the weekend. Then I added some of my own, a few of which were good, a few of which were really dumb. I included everything because you never know what might spark an idea.

If you have a large Street Team, you may want to run a contest with prizes for the person who gets the most shares/likes/etc. or something else to reward the people who put in the most effort. This is something I wish I would have thought to do.

If you don't have a Street Team, start one now. You can begin by setting up a simple sign up form on your website and then ask your fans on social media, your blog, and your newsletter if they'd like to join. Then put a link on your website as well. It will grow over time.

Social media

I am active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest, so that's where I posted these graphics. I did daily posts (with a different graphic each day) on Instagram and Facebook (both profile and page...yes, I know technically you aren't supposed to do that kind of thing on your profile).

If you are aiming to hit a list, **tell people**. As one of my writer friends said, "You should never be modest about your accomplishments [or in this case, goals] as an author." I think most people really want to see you succeed and if they know you have a goal like that in mind, they

will be more willing to help than if you just say, “Hey my book is on sale.” Sales happen all the time; it’s not every day you can help someone hit a bestseller list.

Instagram

- I did daily posts with a different graphic each day.
- I used a core group of about a dozen hashtags and then added others that were more specific to the given graphic.
- The graphic that did the best was the *Winds of Winter* ad. Instagram has hidden the number of likes for me, but I was mentally keeping track and it got over 1,000. I have never had anything like that happen before and I can’t explain why it was this one that hit. I used the same hashtags. This was even still the case when I updated my ads with the award seals.
- When I started to get great numbers and making bestseller lists at Amazon and Barnes & Noble, I took screenshots and posted those as well. That was mainly just me being excited but also a little to show others how well the book was doing in the hopes they’d want to jump on the bandwagon and buy the book, too.



Facebook

- I posted daily with a different graphic each day on both my profile and my page. (Yes, I know you aren’t supposed to advertise anything on your profile, but with the low percentage of people who see anything you post to your page, I do it anyway.)

- I pinned my favorite post to the top of my profile on Monday. That way it would be the first thing people saw all week.
- When I started to get great numbers and making bestseller lists at Amazon and Barnes & Noble, I took screenshots and posted those as well.
- I asked everyone on FB over and over to please share my posts that had the graphics and buy links. I estimate that at least 30 people shared over the course of the week.
- I also posted to about three or four different Facebook groups a day, totaling about 15 groups. There were several others that I never got around to posting in.
 - Be sure to read a group's rules (usually the post pinned to the top in the main area or over on the right-hand column) to see if they allow promotions. Some do, some don't, and some only allow it on certain days or in certain ways (i.e. you have to comment on a post the admins start; you can't start your own.)
 - Don't do too many right in a row or even in the same day because Facebook might accuse you of spamming and lock you out for a period of time, not something you want during a promotion.
 - It's a good idea to participate in the groups first so you don't just look like a spammer.

Twitter

- I did daily posts with a different graphic each day. I pinned that tweet to the top of my profile.
- When I started to get great numbers and making bestseller lists at Amazon and Barnes & Noble, I took screenshots and posted those as well.
- When I was getting close to number 1 in Canada, I started doing specific tweets aimed at Canadian readers. This was my only Canadian promotion; I hadn't done any ads (mine were specific to the U.S.). The rest was word of mouth.

Pinterest






- It didn't occur to me to add my promo graphics to one of my boards (I have one called "Book Shelf (My Books)" for this very purpose) until Friday.
- The reason to do this is to get the graphics onto the boards of your followers for free. I have 18,900 monthly viewers, so that is a lot of people. I wish I would have done it on Monday instead so they would have had longer to see them.
- Two of the graphics were in my top 10 pins for that week, netting a total of 1,018 impressions for free.
- I also promoted a pin, which I will talk about below. It is not included in the numbers of the bullet above.

Advertising (non-newsletter lists)

Facebook/Instagram

Total spend: \$353.78

- I ran a total of five ads using Boosted Posts over the course of a week. In total they reached 13,872 people, 5,062 who engaged (liked, shared, etc.) with the post and 24 of whom clicked a link.
- My most popular post in terms of both reach and engagement was *The Winds of Winter* ad (which isn't surprising since FB and Instagram are now linked). I just wish I understood what made that one so popular.
- The two that posted on Monday and that ran the entire campaign had very different results. The one I thought would do better only had 1,430 reach and 646 engagement, but the other one that was female-focused blew it away with 5,206 reach and 846 engagement. Go figure.
- I had one ad (the bottom one in the image below) that wasn't doing well at all, so I killed it right away.

Recent Ads on Nicole Evelina				+ Create Ad
Ads activity is reported in the time zone of your ad account.				
	Post Engagements ONLY A FEW DAYS LEFT! Get this bestselling t... Promoted by Nicole Evelina on Jul 13, 2019 Completed	1,343 People Reached	638 Post Engagement	\$50.00 Spent of \$50.00 View Results
	Post Engagements Get yours before it's gone! #1 in Fantasy at Bar... Promoted by Nicole Evelina on Jul 12, 2019 Completed	7,134 People Reached	2,875 Post Engagement	\$200.00 Spent of \$200.00 View Results
	Post Engagements 3 books for \$0.99. Limited time only: July 8-15. Promoted by Nicole Evelina on Jul 8, 2019 Completed	5,206 People Reached	846 Post Engagement	\$49.81 Spent of \$50.00 View Results
	Post Engagements You read that right: 3 ebooks for \$0.99 - this we... Promoted by Nicole Evelina on Jul 8, 2019 Completed	1,430 People Reached	646 Post Engagement	\$50.00 Spent of \$50.00 View Results
	Post Engagements Three ebooks for \$0.99. What more could you a... Promoted by Nicole Evelina on Jul 8, 2019 Completed	114 People Reached	57 Post Engagement	\$3.97 Spent of \$25.00 View Results

Pinterest

Total spend: \$16.28

Strategy

- This ad was a last-minute decision that I made on Friday night on a lark.
- I decided to promote one of my pins instead of creating an ad. It is a new option and frankly, way easier. I chose that pin because I felt like it appealed to the widest variety of people and aligned well with Pinterest's mostly female audience.

- I only had two days left in the campaign at that point (less once Pinterest approved my pin), so I didn't throw a lot of money at it—only \$20, of which I actually spent \$16.28.

Results

- The results were 10,328 impressions, 1,400 close-up views, four saves and 132 clicks on the buy link, for a click through rate of 1.28%.
- Verdict: I would totally do this again, but keep my spend low.

BookBub

Total spend = \$383.37

Strategy

- I broke my ads up into ones that would run in the early week before the BookBub Featured Deal and ones that would run in the end part of the week.
- They say the average click-through rate for a BookBub ad is about 0.5%. even though we should all be aiming for at least 3-5%.
- There are a lot of complexities about how you set up your ads and how that affects your rate. I'm not an expert, so I just tried different things to see what worked.
- These ads appear at the bottom of the emails, so opening the email counts as an impression but doesn't guarantee that the ad is seen or clicked on.
- I targeted my ads both by category (fantasy and historical fiction) and author because just doing category alone made my audience too broad. Authors I targeted included Deborah Harkness, Patrick Rothfuss, Terry Brooks, Philippa Gregory, Diana Gabaldon, George R. R. Martin, and Susanna Kearsley.

Results

I ran a few different ads with a few different goals:

- In the early part of the week (Mon-Wed) I ran five ads.
- Three were different graphics, just to see which performed better.
 - Missing Westeros? Visit Camelot: 6,597 impressions, 17 clicks, click through rate of 0.26%
 - Historical Fantasy at its Finest: 6,682 impressions, 26 clicks, click through rate of 0.39%
 - A Woman Rules Camelot: 7,302 impressions, 18 clicks, click through rate of 0.25%
- I also ran ads that just targeted certain retailers, i.e. Apple or B&N, to try to drive up sales there. That didn't work at all. My click through rate for those were 0.03% for Apple and 0.08% for B&N, which is abysmally low. I won't be doing this again.
- In the later part of the week (Fri-Sun) I ran three ads, two of which I designed myself and one of which I used the BookBub ad generator for.
 - Historical Fantasy at its Finest: 2,259 impressions, 3 clicks, click through rate of 0.13%

- Missing Westeros? Visit Camelot: 2,046 impressions, 0 clicks, click through rate of 0%
- BookBub generated ad: 12,364 impressions, 37 clicks, click through rate of 0%

Things I learned:

- Simple ads with little text and the book cover work the best.
- You may as well just use BookBub's ad generator instead of spending the time to design your own.
- The more money you throw at an ad, the more impressions you will get (my budget for the BookBub generated ad was twice that of the others) but that doesn't necessarily mean much higher click-through (that one had only 0.30% vs one of the ones I created with 0.39%)

Will I do BookBub ads again? I'm honestly not sure. I am reading that some people think they have gone the way of Amazon ads: too popular and too expensive to really make a difference anymore. If I do them again, I won't budget as much money, that is for sure.

Amazon Advertising

Spend: \$2.75 (lockscreen) + \$5.22 (product ad) = \$7.97

Strategy

- I originally had two ads going, a lockscreen ad (shows on the locked screen of a Kindle) and a sponsored product ad (shows in the product listing on Amazon when people search for certain terms or authors that you define).
- Amazon doesn't give you a lot of options for customizing your ad. Your image will be your book cover and you have only 150 characters for your ad copy.
- My ad copy was: "Missing Westeros? Visit Camelot. Priestess. Queen. Warrior. Guinevere was much more than a sinner. Experience life through her eyes in a 3-book set."
- My copy focused on *Game of Thrones*, but I also told my audience a little about who the book was about (a Guinevere, who is not your average portrayal. She is a priestess, a queen and a warrior who was more active than the traditional sinner) and what they should expect (there is an implication in the roles I mentioned that they will get magic, political mechanations, and action, plus you know that you will be reading her experience as it happens).
- I chose manual product targeting by category. My categories were 1) /Books/Science Fiction & Fantasy/Fantasy/Epic Fantasy 2) /Books/Science Fiction & Fantasy/Fantasy/Sword & Sorcery Fantasy, and 3) /Books/Science Fiction & Fantasy/Fantasy/Historical Fantasy. I picked these because they are my categories for the book within Amazon as well as the categories I thought my readers would read. Interestingly, these are the three categories I hit #1 in!

- I also targeted a few products, mostly GRRM books, *The Mists of Avalon*, and the categories of Arthurian Fantasy, Historical Fantasy, Romantic Fantasy, Epic Fantasy, Sword and Sorcery Fantasy, Fantasy Anthologies, Mythology and Folk Tales, and Myths & Legend Fantasy.

Results

- I stopped the lockscreen ad after only a day and only spending \$2.75 (with 0 sales) because Amazon just wasn't pushing it out. I won't do lockscreen ads again, as I've noticed from personal experience that they are **heavily** weighted toward Kindle Unlimited books. (Plus a lot of people have them turned off in their settings.)
- Interestingly, my sponsored product ad wasn't pushed out much either. I only spent \$5.22 for 16,846 impressions, but made \$44.15 in sales from it. I had an average click-through rate of 11.82% which is really good.
- Verdict: I might do a sponsored product ad in the future, but I am finding Amazon Ads to be less and less effective.

Things I would do differently

No matter how good any marketing campaign is, there are always lessons learned and things you would do differently next. These are mine:

- I didn't find out about merchandising with major retailers (Barnes & Noble, Apple and Draft2Digital) until my campaign was almost over. Apparently if you tell them you have a sale (and mention BookBub if you have one because they understand how important that is) they may help promote your book. I emailed all of them and only heard back from Barnes & Noble. It was too late for this campaign, but now I have the links to their forms for the future.
- I may not use quite as many newsletter ad services in the future. I don't know. I'm on the fence about that.
- I will add my graphics to Pinterest on the first day of the campaign rather than when it was almost over.
- Maybe engage a VA to help plan/run the campaign. It's a lot of work by yourself.
- Look at Apple stats earlier. That just totally slipped my mind.
- Run a contest with prizes for the person who gets the most shares/likes/etc. or something else to reward the people who put in the most effort.

You can do it!

This may seem overwhelming, but if you break it into chunks and take one thing at a time, it's really not that bad. They schedule BookBub ads about a month in advance so you will have time to take care of all of it.

One last tip: enjoy your promotion week! It is so much fun to watch your sales numbers rise and your category rankings get closer and closer to #1. Take lots of screenshots. You'll thank yourself later.

If you have questions, feel free to email me at nicole.evelina@att.net and I will do my best to answer them. And if you do try this, let me know how it turns out! Good luck!

Nicole Evelina is a USA Today best-selling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She's currently querying her first biography and will take any prayers/good vibes you're willing to send her way.

So You Want to Write a Cookbook

By Ruth Glick a.k.a. Rebecca York



If you love turning ordinary or exotic ingredients into great-tasting dishes, you might consider writing a cookbook. But what kind, exactly?

Narrow it down

Cookbooks run the gamut from soup to nuts, as they say. Many feature regional or ethnic cuisine like Italian or Southern cooking. Others focus on a special diet like low fat, low cal, or gluten free. Some explore recipes for one meal like breakfast, a favorite holiday, or a specialty like pies. Or they may fill a niche market, like perhaps cooking with kale or Nancy Baggett's [*The Art of Cooking with Lavender*](#).

Recipe testing is essential

Picking your subject is the easy part. Then comes the exacting task of bringing a cookbook to life.

Connie Hay, who has ghostwritten and tested recipes for cookbooks for celebrity chefs, says that recipe testing is a must, unless you'd enjoy an angry email about a flat-tire soufflé or other nasty surprise. In fact, your best bet is to develop a recipe, write it down, and test it, perhaps modifying it as you add or subtract ingredients. If you like the results, have someone else make it to find out if they can follow your directions. Or test it again yourself. If your creation isn't ready for prime time, you may have to adjust the flavors or proportions of ingredients. Cookbook author Susan Belsinger once told me that, if she can't make a recipe work in three tries, she gives up on it. I once fiddled with an apricot oat bran bar five times before I was satisfied.

Make it your own

You can get ideas for recipes from other books, articles, blogs or online recipe sites, but you can't just steal them. You need to make some changes in the ingredients, and that doesn't simply

mean altering the amount of salt. Would it be better with less sugar? Butter? Oil? Would adding ginger improve the flavor? How do your chocolate chip cookies differ from the recipe on the package wrapper?

Don't just parrot back someone else's instructions. Can you make this dish faster and easier? For example, start your custard in the microwave to speed the cooking time?

Of course, if you're writing a soup book, you may want to include certain classic recipes—like French Onion Soup or New England Clam Chowder. In that case, your best bet is to look at a lot of recipes, then go off and do your own interpretation.

Getting into the weeds

If you are writing a cookbook for a major publisher, they will give you a style sheet to follow. If not, you will need to settle on a standardized notation for your book. Will you call for 1 tablespoon of olive oil or 1 Tbsp, or 1 T? Are you going to name those little round legumes garbanzo beans or chickpeas? And are you going to use 1 14-oz can of tomato sauce or 1 can (14 oz) tomato sauce? Create a style sheet to keep everything consistent. If your notation is all over the place, your cookbook is not going to look professional.

Also, note that ingredients should be listed in the order that they are used. (And, if possible, add them from the greatest amount to the least, 1 tsp ground cinnamon, 1/2 tsp ground ginger.)

Use an oven thermometer so baking times will be accurate. And give an alternate test of doneness. ("Bake 25 to 30 minutes at 350 degrees or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.")

Don't skim on the proofreading

All those pesky details make a proofreading nightmare. Edit your cookbook several times, then give it to a professional editor with knowledge of cooking and cookbooks. If you can't locate one, check recipes in small batches to make sure you're not zoning out and missing important details. Did you forget to tell the cook when to add the milk, cover the pot, or turn down the heat when the mixture comes to a boil?

Headnotes engage the reader

As you design recipes, be thinking about your headnotes, the information before the ingredients list. This is your chance to tell why you've included this recipe and get your readers interested in the dish. ("I loved the Apple Cranberry Crumble at the Harbor Restaurant in Portland, Maine, so much that I wanted to recreate it at home.") This is also a good place to give the reader helpful tips. ("Hint: Don't substitute Cool Whip for real whipped cream.")

What about pictures?

Before the advent of digital photography, most cookbooks were published without pictures, and some still are. Today's readers want to see some of the finished dishes, which means that authors of self-published cookbooks must develop their photography skills or work with a photographer who knows how to make food look appealing. Good food photography requires good lighting (natural light is best) plus using appropriate containers and other props. But

always remember that the focus should be on the food, not the pretty tablecloth or candlesticks. If you are working with a major publisher, they will hire a photographer.

Going to print

You'll need to pay special attention to formatting both for e-cookbooks and print. If you are self-publishing and want printed copies of your book, Lightning Source will not charge extra for color pictures if you use their cheaper color photography option. Kindle Direct Publishing charges extra for color in print books. Or if you're willing to spend more on the production, work with a professional designer and a foreign printer who can give you a book that's up to New York standards.

How many recipes do you need?

Most hardcover cookbooks have at least two hundred recipes. But if you're covering only one subject or writing for a niche market, you might be able to get away with seventy-five or a hundred.

Cookbooks can be an excellent way to advertise fiction

I've done boxed sets with other writers, and several times we've published a cookbook that highlights the set. This works particularly well with a holiday theme. I've been the editor on these books and asked each participant to write headnotes linking the recipe to her story. Perhaps it's the hero or heroine's favorite food. Or the characters enjoy the dish during the story.

One more type of cookbook is a labor of love—family recipes collected and printed for relatives

You should follow format guidelines, but of course you don't have to be as rigorous. Just be careful to accurately document Grandma's beloved Marshmallow Topped Sweet Potato Casserole or her Tomato Aspic Salad.

A cookbook is another outlet for your creativity. But only you can decide if it's worth the time and effort and fits into your fiction writing career.

Links

<http://kitchenlane.com/2012/11/cookbook-publisher-gives-advice.html>

<http://kitchenlane.com/2012/02/what-cookbook-editors-are-looking-for.html>

<http://kitchenlane.com/2010/07/introducing-recipe-three-big-dos-donts.html>

Food photography

<http://kitchenlane.com/2014/04/10-ways-to-tell-if-your-food-photos-are.html>

Cookbook style sheet & recipe format

<https://rebeccayork.com/the-author/tips-for-writers/cookbook-style-sheet-recipe-format/>

Ruth Glick began her career as a newspaper feature writer, which led to her interest in food writing. In addition to her more than 100 novels and novellas, written as Rebecca York, she is the author or co-author of more than 15 cookbooks. Her [100% Pleasure](#) from Rodale Press, written with Nancy Baggett, was named by USA Today as one of the best cookbooks of 1994. Her [Diabetes Snack Munch Nibble Book](#) was a bestseller for the American Diabetes Association and was purchased as a premium give-away by Merck Medical. Her latest cooking, with Nancy Baggett, is the self-published [The 2 Day a Week Diet Cookbook](#).

The Art of the Ending

By Michele Dunaway



There's a moment, when I finish editing a book, that I go "Damn. Who wrote that? Oh yeah. Me."

It's that moment of satisfaction. Of pride. Of recognition that I'm a writer, and that I actually can write something that someone wants to read.

For me, the hardest parts of the book to write are the beginning and the middle. Sometimes I will even write the ending first, simply because I can already visualize it. Sometimes I tag on an epilogue simply because I don't want to leave the story feeling unfinished while other times that's not necessary. In the process of wrapping things up and delivering a good ending, I'm not alone.

"I have never liked open-ended stories, so as a writer, I try to tie up most, if not all, plot points and character arcs," [Nicole Evelina](#) said. "I don't want everything to be so neat that it seems to be tied up in a nice little bow, because life isn't like that, and neither should a story be. But if I made a promise to the reader anywhere in the book, I need to make sure I've fulfilled that promise by the end of the book."

"My endings must have both hero and heroine overcome their personal conflicts so the story arc can resolve its conflict," [Allison Lane](#) said. "In the process, I must tie up all loose ends (unless the book is part of a series in which those loose ends will play a part in the future.) I do try to tie up loose ends not involving the h/h before that last scene so it doesn't get cluttered, however."

Tying up plot points is done so that the reader feels satisfied.

"As a reader I like to see all the loose threads tied up, so that's what I try to do as a writer," [Anna Gracie](#) said. "Even if it's a series with an ongoing story arc, I want the loose ends of that episode or story satisfactorily tied up. I also like to ensure that my main character(s) have changed and that the change is believable. But what I really, really want is for the reader to finish the book with a big satisfied 'ahhh.'"

"The ending should feel natural and it should be satisfying for the characters, the readers, the story," [Barbara Meyers](#) said. "Obviously, if it's romance (mostly what I write), there must be

a HEA or a HFN ending. But it should also circle back to some early connection between the main characters.”

“I want to fulfill the promise to the reader that I made when I conned the reader into bonding with this character. I’m obligated to know what the reader’s biggest question(s) about that character might be, and to answer them. Since a lot of my stories are romances, there will be at least two questions, probably three: the inner character question (for example, did this person ever grow the hell up), the external plot question (did this character save the ranch), and the relationship question (did this character win true love),” [Jennifer Stevenson](#) said.

Pleasing readers is important, but at the same time, writers have to balance the needs of the story with remaining true to themselves.

“I think you have to be true to the ending the story demands,” Evelina said. “Not all stories have happy endings (except in romance, of course). I read a retelling of Tristan and Isolde once where the author gave the story a happy ending. While I understand why she thought that was a good idea, it didn’t work. Tristan and Isolde is one of the great tragedies of literature; to give it a happy ending just to satisfy readers is disingenuous to the story.”

“I’m crafting an ending for readers, so naturally I want them to be happy with it,” Gracie said. “As a reader I’ve sometimes felt cheated by an ending, so I don’t want to do that. However, I have written at least one book where some readers wanted a different ending for my character. For me that ending was historically unbelievable and psychologically impossible — it would have been a betrayal of everything she was and believed in in the previous three books. The majority of readers, I think, were happy with my ending.”

Evelina faced a similar dilemma with ending her Guinevere trilogy. “I knew from the very beginning how it would end and that the ending was unconventional, so some people would love it and some would hate it,” she said. “But it is the only ending **my** version of the story could have. So I went with it. Sometimes you have to take a risk in the name of your art. It’s your book. If people don’t like the ending, they can go write their own story.”

For Stevenson, one of the “rules” of romance is that the relationship question ends the book, as, in theory, romance readers care more about that. However, at least twice she’s found herself doing it backwards.

“*Fools Paradise*, a blue-collar romance about stagehands, resolves the love story first, and then the hero has to unscramble a social problem worthy of a Regency novel,” she said. “*Coed Demon Sluts: Pog* wraps up the relationship when the hero sets out to rescue the heroine from a prison cell in Hell, and then we have another 20 percent of the story to polish off the demon posse chasing them, and to resolve the big story question of the entire series.”

There can be a danger in flipping the script.

“If you write an unconventional or unexpected ending, you have a responsibility to make sure you don’t betray your readers,” Evelina said. “What I mean by that is if all signs are pointing to one ending and you go and give your readers a different one, they will be upset. *cough* *Game of Thrones* *cough* If you want to have a twist ending, that is fine, but lay the seeds throughout the book or series and subtly build up to it, so that once they get over their shock, the readers can look/think back and realize you really did intend that ending all along.”

Besides readers, editors can come into play in how a story ends. The same rules of deciding what balance to maintain applies.

"I rarely bow to what readers want since what my characters want is more important," Lane said. "But I did have one book in which my editor called me immediately after reading it, screaming: 'Kill that man! I want him dead!' I pointed out that it was impossible to kill him in the context of the current book but promised I would kill him promptly at the beginning of the sequel, which I did. (She was right; he needed to die.)"

But Lane admits, satisfying readers is important. "As a reader, I was seriously disappointed once when the last book of a series failed to adequately tie up loose ends or utilize clues that had been scattered over previous books," she said. "It also filled too many pages with do-nothing crap, chewing up space that could have been better used to tie up those loose ends. My son felt the same way and actually wrote an outline for what that last book should have looked like given all the clues leading up to it..."

"I also have a time-travel in my collection of books containing serious flaws in which the author spent three-quarters of the book laying out the firm rules for time traveler behavior, then crammed three-quarters of the action into the last quarter of the book while the characters raced around breaking every one of the rules with impunity," Lane added. "Serious pacing problems, in addition to the rule breaking. So how one ends a book does matter."

Ending a book can become even more complicated when the book is part of a series. Lane plots out the series in advance.

"For a trilogy, I lay out the overall story arc before starting, then divide the action into thirds, making sure that each third ends with a bang," she said. "Then I figure out the arc for each individual story, including what personal goals each character must achieve in that portion of the overall arc. Then I write each book as a stand-alone with all the rules I use for a single book, tying up loose ends connected to that arc but leaving the larger ones for the trilogy arc hanging. This assumes I use the same main characters for each book in the trilogy. If my trilogy involves multiple couples, each taking a turn being the h/h, then it is easier since each book must end that couple's personal story so is even more like a stand-alone book."

Evelina believes this approach also helps to maintain series momentum.

"I think the key is to have clear plot and character arcs for each book in the series," she said. "Let's say you're on the second book in a trilogy. As long as you bring the ones for this book to fruition at the end and have propelled your overall series arc forward, you should be fine. That being said, you do want to end that book on a question or a point of action so that people want to buy the next book. But be careful of cliffhangers. Nothing irritates a reader more when a book just ... ends. You can leave your reader hanging, but it needs to be in a way that the book can stand alone. That's a tough balance."

"I don't write linked series with an overarching plot, so I can't comment as a writer," Gracie said. "But I read a lot of fantasy and paranormal where this is normal, and I think as long as each story or episode is wound up satisfactorily, I'm contented. I have been known to scream when a writer leaves me with a cliffhanger at the end of a long book in the middle of a series, and I had to wait more than a year to find out what happened to the tiny girl fleeing into the snowy forest. <g>"

Stevenson agrees on being careful with cliffhangers. “I did a cliffhanger once, at the end of *The Hinky Genie Lamp*,” she said. “Never again. The pressure to finish that series is equaled only by my disinclination to write the damned finale. Causation or correlation? No capes, no cliffhangers.”

And on that note, dear reader, we’re going to leave you hanging until next month for Part Three.

Michele Dunaway liked how *The Vampire Diaries* ended, but hated how *The Originals* ended, both CW shows. She’s still out on *The Sopranos*’ fade-to-black, which you can [read about here](#) in this article from January 2019.

Self-Published eBooks and the Library Market

Access isn't everything

By Edie Claire



Ever since Smashwords broke into the library market in 2014 by distributing self-published ebooks to OverDrive, library access has only gotten easier. Now indies can get their ebooks listed on OverDrive through a variety of distributors including Draft2Digital, PublishDrive, and Kobo (now a sister company to OverDrive, under their Rakuten parent). But merely checking that little “distribute to” box isn’t likely to result in actual sales. There are multiple—and largely invisible—hurdles between self-published authors and acquiring librarians, and overcoming these obstacles will require some dedicated effort.

The Bad News, part one: Discoverability

For a glimpse into how librarians make ebook purchasing choices, I interviewed Mary Lee Hart, the collection development librarian at my local library. As expected, the primary goal of library acquisitions is to anticipate which books will be most demanded by patrons. Hence, the largest part of the purchasing budget will go toward bestsellers promoted by the Big Five. The ranks will be further filled out by books receiving positive reviews in the tried-and-true print media with which librarians like Hart are already familiar. But while some of these discovery vehicles (such as *Kirkus Reviews* and Ingram’s *Advance* catalog) are open to self-published works, the playing field is far from even. Paid reviews are generally designated as such. Sponsored slots in Ingram’s print catalog are relegated to the back under the dubious heading of “Publisher Selects.” And even those vehicles supposedly devoted to the underserved, such as *Foreword Reviews*, have terms incompatible with a commercial self-publishing model, such as requiring submission of a manuscript for review at least four months before its release. In fact, the whole traditional model of library acquisition, built around buying new releases while they’re hot, is a poor fit with the slow-build, long-tail pattern of professional self-publishing.

Acquiring librarians do reserve a portion of the budget for books other than current bestsellers. But librarians have little motivation to search specifically in buckets devoted to self-

published titles, particularly when most individuals lack an understanding of the difference between a hobbyist writer and a professional self-published-by-choice novelist. For the same reason, any author attempt at direct marketing to librarians is highly likely to wind up in the trash bin.

The Bad News, part two: Ease of Purchase

While libraries can purchase ebooks from a variety of vendors, the reality is that around 90 percent of U.S. public libraries source their ebooks from OverDrive. OverDrive seems preferred not only because of the breadth of media in its catalog, but also because of easy-to-use apps, which libraries rely on for digital lending. The company's main competitors, Baker and Taylor Axis 360, Bibliotheca, and Odilo, still command only a minor slice of the pie. But while self-published authors can list titles with OverDrive through various distributors, authors cannot see how those titles are being presented to librarians because OverDrive's library "Marketplace" is not public-facing.

Curious whether my own titles were as visible as their traditionally published counterparts, I consulted Hart. In accordance with OverDrive's TOS, the library could not offer me a firsthand look at its dedicated interface. But I was provided with some general information. Like most online catalogs, OverDrive makes searching easy with a prominently placed search box. Yet, a search for my books brought up absolutely nothing, even though I distribute to OverDrive via both Kobo and a direct OverDrive publisher account. My books could only be reached by opening up a drop-down menu under the main search bar and then scrolling down to an option labeled "Self-published."

Finally, a little good news

Publishing may have changed drastically in the last decade, but the motivation of acquisitions librarians has not: they seek to buy whatever materials best serve their patrons. Herein lies the single most powerful strategy for the self-published: patron recommendations. When I polled my Facebook readers about their library use, I was surprised. Many not only regularly borrowed ebooks from the library, but my readers also knew how to request titles for purchase. One reader informed me that he frequently made recommendations; so far his library has bought every one of them. Hart confirmed that my library system not only considers every request but buys the majority. If the author or publisher is an unknown quantity, the purchase decision may come down to price. But any ebook costing single digits is generally considered worth a shot.

Patrons can submit book requests through the same OverDrive interface they use for borrowing. Some libraries have a "recommend" option associated with their own local online catalog, others use a physical suggestion box with paper slips, and many use a combination. But in this case, OverDrive's domination of the market is of significant benefit to self-published authors because a patron's search for a book to recommend includes *all* OverDrive titles. With one click, your loyal reader can send a request straight to their acquisitions librarian—complete with a dedicated link to your book.

The distribution question

OverDrive customer support says it makes no difference how your titles are submitted to OverDrive. Yet, my own experimentation revealed certain variations. Considering the relative difficulty of using an OverDrive publisher account (which requires Excel-formatted metadata and FTP file transfer), I had hoped this distribution method might save me from the self-published dungeon. It did not, although rumor suggests that others might have had better luck. But one advantage a direct account does offer is access to OverDrive's free merchandising opportunities, such as their e-newsletters and seasonal focus campaigns. Whether these are effective sales tools is an open question.

Another difference I stumbled upon was that the route by which a title reaches OverDrive affects whether or not that book is "available on Kindle" after purchase. It's not a matter of providing a mobi file; when a Kindle-compatible ebook is borrowed via OverDrive, the borrower is rerouted to Amazon.com for the actual download. Rather, it's a contractual matter. Books distributed directly through OverDrive show as Kindle-compatible. Ebooks distributed through Kobo (as their customer service confirmed) will not. Draft2Digital's customer service asserted that its contract with OverDrive *does* require Kindle-compatibility, although D2D has experienced some delays in execution.

How much does Kindle-compatibility matter? Since Kindle Fires and other tablets can read ePubs in apps, the only devices affected are e-ink versions like the Paperwhite. Older Kindle ereaders (like my trusty 3rd generation with keyboard) can't handle library loans in any event. When I queried the librarian who buys fiction at my local branch, she said that although she preferred Kindle-compatibility, lack of it wasn't a deal-breaker.

Royalties on library purchases differ slightly among the distributors, with OverDrive and Kobo paying 50 percent of list price and Smashwords offering 45 percent. Draft2Digital pays 46.75 percent and offers the option of Cost per Checkout as well as One Copy, One User pricing.

And now, it's up to your readers

Getting your books into libraries is a two-part process of distribution and patron action. My personal attempt at the second part involves a clickable "Read At the Library" button in the footer of every page of my website, combined with a downloadable PDF giving specific instructions on how to request my (or any other favored author's) books. (Check it out at www.edieclaire.com.) I've told my readers that I've done all I could to make my books available for borrowing through libraries. Now, it's up to them.

Edie Claire is a USA-Today bestselling author of 26 novels of mystery, romantic and women's fiction, and humor. She was first published traditionally in 1999 but went indie in 2009 and has never looked back. When not haunting the stacks of Northland Library, a part of the Allegheny County Library System, she can be reached at edie@edieclaire.com.

Building Literary Citizenship

By Lindsay Randall



For book reviewer and editorial consultant [Ron Hogan](#), lifting up the work of authors has been a labor of love for more than 30 years. In 1995, Hogan effectively brought the literary scene online with the creation of [Beatrice](#), a website devoted to connecting readers with writers. He is co-founder and co-curator of [Lady Jane's Salon®](#), a fiction reading series first begun in New York City more than 10 years ago, and it now has satellite salons across the country. He also offers a [newsletter for writers](#) and curates a number of book events both online and in the Metro New York area.

In today's parlance, Hogan is a good literary citizen. He is devoted to maintaining a bridge between readers and authors and to applauding excellence in writing.

"It feels good to be able to spread the word about creative work that I value, both because I get to celebrate people whose work I enjoy and because I get to bring that work to other people, who will hopefully be as excited by it as I am," Hogan said.

What is a literary citizen?

[Jennifer Jean](#), an educator, editor, activist and poet, often [teaches](#) and [tweets](#) about literary citizenship. She defines a literary citizen as a writer who engages their various communities through well-intentioned work such as:

- Building or hosting a reading series
- Building or volunteering with literary programs for disadvantaged populations
- Building, working or volunteering at writing festivals and conferences
- Writing reviews
- Mentoring emerging writers
- Patronizing locally owned bookstores and independent presses
- Introducing literature to young people
- Buying and advocating for books

Jean believes that the literary ecosystem can thrive if writers join in to help.

“Every realm of life is interdependent. The literary world is no different,” Jean said. “For instance, if a writer seeks readers, a writer should naturally be a reader—purchasing and advocating for books.”

Hogan holds a similar philosophy. “When you do your bit to sustain a culture that values creativity and imagination, and values reading as a form of pleasure, sure, that’s a culture that might be receptive to your work, but even if that weren’t the case, those are important things to celebrate in and of themselves,” he said.

Literary citizenship through a successful reading series

For author, blogger, and educator [Brian Fanelli, Ph.D.](#), being a good literary citizen ranks high on his list.

Since 2011, Fanelli has put his belief into action through the Writers’ Showcase, a reading series he created to help elevate the work of others.

“The publishing industry has changed so much. If you have a book coming out, even with a big publisher, the promo budgets are limited. We have to support each other, otherwise these books and these voices won’t get out there,” Fanelli said.

Based in Scranton, Pennsylvania, at The [Olde Brick Theatre](#), the Writers’ Showcase has featured nearly 300 authors since its inception, showcasing a mix of genres and styles in fiction and poetry. Readings are held quarterly and include four to five readers per session. Authors from around the country serve as guest speakers.

“It’s amazing to see the different writers connect after each showcase,” Fanelli said. “We have really advocated for women in literature. We now have one showcase per year that is all female. We’re also bringing in student writers and putting them with more established writers.”

Through the years, audience numbers have ranged from as few as 20 people to as many as 100. Today, attendance averages in the 40 to 50 range. Admission is a suggested \$4.00 donation, which is given to the theater to help cover heating and electricity costs. The books of each presenter are available for purchase.

“The most important thing for me is promoting the work of writers and possibly developing a mentorship between new writers and the more established writers,” Fanelli said.

Networking and knowledge

[Dawn Leas](#) first came to the Writers’ Showcase as an attendee and later as a speaker. In 2015, she joined Fanelli as co-host.

“What I love about a reader series like the Writers’ Showcase is that it brings different community together. You can see the breadth of talent you might not necessarily know about,” Leas said.

As a poet, writing coach and freelance writer, Leas appreciates the opportunity for networking that co-hosting a reading series offers—but the real reward for her is in nurturing and promoting the talent in others.

"I want to have a part in helping those who have worked really hard to get a book published," Leas said. "I want to help them get their words and stories out in a public forum."

Author [Barbara J. Taylor](#), whose novels are set in the historic district of Providence in Scranton, where The Olde Brick Theatre is located, has been a guest of the Writers' Showcase. She believes that a healthy local literary scene is instrumental in the growth of a writer.

"Writers need to be able to go out into the world and share with other writers—their writing, their struggles, their triumphs. All of it. At the same time, that can be scary, but I find these literary opportunities to be safe spaces for those kinds of interactions," Taylor said.

She also enjoys the ambience that The Olde Brick Theatre offers.

"I remember standing in front of that microphone thinking, my characters walked these streets, walked past this very building countless times, and here I am. There's something magical in that," Taylor said. "And there's something magical about having the Writers' Showcase events in a place with such history."

Is it a distraction or a benefit?

While building literary citizenship is a worthy goal, the reality remains that there are only so many hours in a day. Authors are busy. Finding time for extra things is a challenge.

Does working for good disrupt an author's production, or enhance it? And can it become too costly for authors who need to be paid for their time?

"Writers should choose which citizenship activities they feel most comfortable with," Jean said, adding that, "it's always okay to ask for funding for work. It's also okay to say no to work that doesn't include funding. An author should honor their own boundaries and stick to what they are comfortable offering the literary world."

Leas noted that being involved with a reading series is "a natural piece of the puzzle" in her creative life.

"The collaborative part of being a literary citizen is important to me," she said. "It's this circular flow of creativity."

For Fanelli, hosting the Writers' Showcase feeds his own writing. He also makes it a priority to guard his creative time while helping others share what they have created.

"A balance can be struck," he said. "But if we don't support a literary community, it will not exist."

Lindsay Randall has served as assistant editor of Nink for the past two years as part of her contribution to being a literary citizen.

Genre Switch Up

Save Your Creativity, Part 3

By Denise A. Agnew



In this third and final installment, four more authors tell us how they've survived and thrived by writing in more than one genre.

Long-time author [Patricia Rice](#) currently writes in two genres: contemporary romantic mystery and historical psychic romance.

"I started out in historical romance because that was what I was reading," she said. "Way back in the mists of time, I read both Regency romance (in hardcover at the library) and historical romance (paperback at the drugstore). I didn't aspire to hardcover when I started out, so I wrote the kind of historical romances I saw the most on store shelves. But after selling the first few, my editor asked if I could write a short Regency romance since she had a spot to fill. I was pretty well-read in the genre and I loved writing it. And I learned that switching gears helped clean out the cobwebs so I could return fresh to the other genre when I was ready."

The eventual shift in genres freshened her creative palate and she didn't hesitate with the first switch because the genres weren't that different.

"I hesitated later, when I finally decided to move from Western historical romance into full-length Regency, because I wasn't sure my audience would follow," she said. "But writing those smaller Regencies gave me a boost and the transition was pretty seamless. When I decided to write contemporary romance, that was a big shift. But I had stories that needed to be told and my agent encouraged me and it all worked out, I think."

As with some of the other authors interviewed for this series, the biggest question centers around whether the authors regretted bouncing back and forth between genres. Rice's answer proves that understanding her own creativity and what kept her creating was key to a happier writing life.

"I'm fairly certain I hurt my career by jogging all over the genres and even writing outside genre. I regret that," Rice said. "But I'm not a person who can keep writing the same stories and settings over and over. I just can't. So I keep looking for new ways of approaching the same

audience with different versions of what they expect and just hope my voice carries over. Writing in more than one genre is an absolute necessity for my creativity. Just writing a six-book series is constraining. By the sixth book, my muse is inserting cannons in my contemporaries, or weddings in my mysteries, and I'm running off to Scotland because I just can't face California again, and things get very messy."

She shared the following advice for other authors with this dilemma.

"If there is any way possible, find a strong link that your audience can follow. I finally wised up and started writing series, so readers can follow my historical characters. I developed a family that they could follow into the modern world. It has persuaded some of my readers to read both contemporary and historical, and if I produce fast enough, then they're willing to wait for the next book in the genre they prefer. Without that link, it's like starting all over again—really tough."

[Patricia Sergeant](#) writes contemporary romance and romantic suspense. Under Olivia Matthews, she writes cozy mysteries.

"I started my publishing career in romantic suspense. That's what I most love to write, a rich, empowering romance combined with fast-paced, high-tension suspense," Sergeant said.

Like many authors who roll with the tide when the publishing industry changes, Sergeant looked toward a change. She said, "When the bottom fell out of the romantic suspense industry—allegedly—my publisher asked me to switch to contemporary romance. I didn't think I could plot a story without a dead body, but I could. And I enjoyed it, but I've never given up trying to make my way back to romantic suspense. I miss the puzzles. The puzzles are what prompted me to write mysteries, and I'm loving that, too. I don't regret anything I've written, but I often second guess myself. Would I be more marketable, would I have a stronger, more successful career if I'd remained focused on one genre or subgenre? I don't know, but I do know that I love writing everything I've written."

Her advice to authors considering a genre switch includes planning ahead.

"This isn't something you jump into. Determine why you want to write in multiple genres, then think about how you'll do it," she said. "For example, will you take on pseudonyms? Will you maintain separate websites, separate social media platforms, or will you market yourself under one umbrella? Make your plan, and then work that plan."

Author [Suza Kates](#) publishes paranormal romance and is working on a crime novel. Her first novel, though, was a romantic suspense.

"I just absorbed *The DaVinci Code* and had envisioned myself being Dan Brown meets Nora Roberts!" she said. "I still have a love for history, adventure, and puzzles and often use them in my paranormal stories."

She explained her genre change.

"I had an idea about witches that would need to be a series. I dove in, and it turned out to be my best writing decision and most successful books to date," she said. "I am now writing a spinoff of that series. I didn't hesitate to jump from romantic suspense to paranormal romance, but I have taken a longer time to prepare for the bigger leap to crime fiction. I feel the requirements and writing style are very different, and I want to do well."

Kates hasn't regretted switching up genres.

“Sometimes I just get tired of being immersed in the same ‘world,’ because I often write trilogies or series. Moving to another genre gives me a new outlet, sparks different ideas, and allows my creativity to visit places it might not while I’m writing other types of books,” she said.

Her advice to other authors is to choose a genre based on what they already enjoy and not what they think will sell.

“When we write what we love, that comes through to our readers,” she said. “I would also say do the research but go ahead and play with some ideas, especially if the new genre involves changes to writing style. But don’t get bogged down by fear. An author may not realize the talent they have for a particular genre if they never try.”

Historical mystery author [Victoria Thompson’s](#) first 20 books were historical romance.

“When I published my first book in 1985, I didn’t fully understand what a genre was. I wrote it because I had been reading lots of westerns, but I wanted more romance and a spunkier heroine than usually found in Westerns. I received five rejections. Eventually, I realized it was actually a historical romance set in the Old West. Once I sent it to the right publisher, it was published,” she said.

Thompson didn’t have a choice in changing genres because after 20 romance books over 13 years, cowboys went out of style. As a result, her sales dropped, and her publisher dropped her.

“With my poor numbers, no other publisher wanted any romances from me either, so I had to switch,” she said. “I knew ‘romantic suspense’ was going to be the next hot genre because everyone I knew wanted to write it and wanted to read it. (I was right, too!) I’d been sending proposals to my agent for months and getting glowing rejections, so when my publisher dropped me, I focused on the romantic suspense. But I just couldn’t sell anything. My agent kept suggesting I try writing a mystery series, but I thought there were already too many mystery series out there and I actually said, ‘Ew, I don’t want to be stuck writing the same characters over and over!’”

However, a year later, Thompson’s agent told her Berkley was looking for someone to write a historical mystery series set in New York City with a midwife heroine.

“Was I interested? You bet,” she said. “Twenty years later, that series is now 22 books long and still going. I’m making good money and still enjoying my work. I’ve even added a second series.”

Her advice to authors considering a switch is to give it careful thought and to “be sure you really love the new genre and are switching for the right reasons. Also respect the new genre and research it thoroughly, learning the tropes and expectations before jumping in.”

There are many unique journeys in the writing world. Hearing from these authors has cemented the idea that a genre switch up can often be a good thing when it comes to keeping creativity sharp.

Denise A. Agnew is the award-winning author of over 69 novels and screenplays. Denise’s novels Love from The Ashes and Blackout were optioned for film/TV by Where’s Lucy? Productions, Bright Frontier Films and MDR Entertainment. Denise is a Writer/Producer (Where’s Lucy? Productions, Happy Catastrophe Productions, Bright

Frontier Films), a paranormal investigator, Reiki Master, and Certified Creativity Coach. As a creativity coach, Denise assists anyone in the creative arts to maintain lifelong creativity. You can find her at www.deniseagnew.com and www.creativepencoaching.com.

The Mad Scribbler

Counterfeit

By Laura Resnick



"Fake goods aren't totally bad, at least it created jobs at some counterfeit factories...We don't want to be a brand that nobody wants to copy."

—Patrizio Bertelli, CEO of Prada

Douglas Preston, a best-selling writer and current president of the Authors Guild, wrote an [article](#) in the *Los Angeles Times* this summer in which he pointed out that one of the key problems writers face today "is the surge in book-selling scams: counterfeiting, author 'doppelganging,' title cloning, ebook piracy, cut-and-paste plagiarism and other rip-offs—many of which take place on digital platforms like Amazon, eBay and Google."

Preston defines counterfeiting this way: "The physical book is reproduced in its entirety, printed and sold to unsuspecting customers. In the case of pirated ebooks, the electronic file is simply stripped of digital copy protection and uploaded to a piracy website."

Or, as a number of NINC members have learned upon discovering their own works have been stolen, the thief culls the entire text, perhaps changes a few names and details, and then repackages, uploads, and sells the ebook as their own work. Preston's article cites an example of this familiar scam: author Laura Pedersen discovered that her personal memoir, *Buffalo Gal*, "was stolen and put up for sale on Amazon—but with a new cover, title and author." (Yes, someone stole an *autobiography* to pass off as their own book.)

"As fake and illegitimate texts proliferate online, books are becoming a form of misinformation," the *New York Times* [warned](#) a few weeks ago. "The Authors Guild said that in the last two years, the number of piracy and counterfeiting issues referred to its legal department has increased tenfold."

The article, written by David Streitfeld, describes multiple counterfeit editions of George Orwell books that he recently purchased on Amazon. He gives examples "like the edition of [Orwell's] memoir *Down and Out in Paris and London* that was edited for high school students. The author's estate said it did not give permission for the book, printed by Amazon's self-

publishing subsidiary. Some counterfeiters are going as far as to claim Orwell's classics as their own property, copyrighting them with their own names."

Such counterfeit books are often rife with errors. Streitfeld—and also other readers, whose experiences he reports—found these various volumes riddled with typos, scrambled phrases and sentences. The books were often missing paragraphs and whole story chunks. A counterfeit edition of *Down and Out in Paris and London* inexplicably prints all the French in the book in capital letters, AS IF THE BOOK IS SHOUTING AT THE READER.

Even the titles of these fakes contain mistakes. A counterfeit edition of *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* has *Animals Farm: A Fair Story* printed on its back cover. A preface changes the name of Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, the author's personal account of fighting for the Republican army in Spain, to *Homepage to Catalonia*. (Apparently the counterfeiter was unaware that the World Wide Web didn't exist during the Spanish Civil War.)

"My newly acquired Orwell shelf was frankly dismal—typos galore, flap copy lifted directly from Wikipedia, covers that screamed 'amateur,'" Streitfeld reports. "Eleven of the books were sold directly by Amazon as new books and were shipped from an Amazon warehouse; one was sold as a new book by a third party."

Streitfeld has written several times about this problem, and specifically about Amazon's role in maintaining a marketplace where counterfeiters thrive. In [June](#), he observed that Amazon "takes a hands-off approach to what goes on in its bookstore, never checking the authenticity, much less the quality, of what it sells. It does not oversee the sellers who have flocked to its site in any organized way. That has resulted in a kind of lawlessness."

There is even a sense that the retail giant promotes and endorses counterfeit works. As Streitfeld points out, Amazon tends to bundle all the reviews of a title together, regardless of which edition they were written for. This ensures that a [counterfeit version](#) of a book will have hundreds or even thousands of positive reviews, giving shoppers the erroneous impression that the book is a valid edition. Conversely, negative reviews exposing an edition as a phony will remain even if the counterfeit version is removed, thus giving the impression that a valid/authorized volume is a fake one.

"Once a week a counterfeit pops up," said Bill Hamilton, the agent for the Orwell estate. "When will a company like Amazon take responsibility for the curation of the products passing through their hands?"

Well, it turns out that if you complain in the pages of the NYT, and your criticisms get repeated by other media outlets reporting on your observations... Amazon notices—and reacts by asserting that the criticism is invalid.

The mega-conglomerate posted on its blog: "A recent *New York Times* article claims that Amazon doesn't care about counterfeits and takes a hands-off approach to what is sold in our stores. Nothing could be further from the truth. We invest substantial amounts of time and resources to protect our customers from counterfeit products, including books."

The [blog post](#) describes a range of tools and techniques that Amazon employs to battle counterfeit products, and Amazon cites the company's enormous expenditures that are aimed at protecting its customers from fraud. This, they say, ensures that "only authentic products are sold in our stores. We investigate every claim of potential counterfeit thoroughly and in the rare

instance where a bad actor gets through, we take swift action, including removing the item, permanently banning bad actors, pursuing legal action, and working with law enforcement when appropriate.”

One is relieved to learn that Amazon takes the problem seriously. And, obviously, counterfeiting is a complex and evolving challenge, one that it would be unrealistic to expect the company to be 100% successful at eliminating from its vast international platform with millions of sellers.

That said, Amazon’s statement nonetheless appears disingenuous. For example, how about that phrase, “in the *rare instance* where bad actors get through?”

The NYT article cited *numerous* instances of counterfeiting involving the works of just *one* author. Unless the late George Orwell is remarkably unlucky, one can draw a pretty obvious conclusion. Indeed, Streitfeld has cited numerous *other* examples in his articles, too.

Such as: “People complained last summer that fakes of [Andrew Sean Greer’s] Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Less*, were being sold as the real thing. There was a counterfeit edition of Danielle Trussoni’s acclaimed memoir, *Falling Through the Earth*, on [Amazon] that misspelled her name on the cover. Lauren Groff tweeted that there was ‘an illegal paperback’ of *Florida*, her National Book Award nominee, on Amazon.”

Streitfeld also cites counterfeit editions of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, of stories by Jorge Luis Borges, and of *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie.

“Technical books, which tend to be more expensive than fiction, are frequent victims,” he notes. “No Starch Press has tried to squelch fake editions of its computer manuals for three years. Mr. Pollock, No Starch’s founder, said Amazon had the same laid-back approach to bad actors on its platform as Facebook and YouTube.”

And so on.

Moreover, it’s not as if Streitfeld is a lone voice or noisy crank. An Author’s Guild spokesperson this summer [described](#) Amazon’s marketplace as “teaming with counterfeits, infringing summaries, and even scams.” Last month, a study by the Recording Industry of America [found](#) that 25 percent of CD sales “Fulfilled by Amazon” (sold by third-party retailers and shipped by Amazon) are counterfeit. Indeed, the problem of third-party sellers and counterfeit products is so pervasive on Amazon that [Quartz](#) reports, “Pressure on the company has been growing as brands such as Birkenstock and Mercedes Benz have lambasted it for not being able to control the problem.”

In February, Amazon acknowledged the scope of the problem in its annual earnings report to investors and the US Securities and Exchange Commission: “We also may be unable to prevent sellers in our stores or through other stores from selling unlawful, counterfeit, pirated, or stolen goods, selling goods in an unlawful or unethical manner, violating the proprietary rights of others, or otherwise violating our policies.”

None of this seems identical to Amazon’s recent assertion that it’s “rare” for a bad actor to get through their safety measures.

The Authors Guild credibly [opines](#) that “a major contributing factor to the rise in book piracy and counterfeiting is that the law does not hold internet platforms accountable for the illegal activities that occur through their marketplaces.”

In other words, if the worst result for the global conglomerate is that some manufacturers and journalists “lambaste” them for this, maybe Amazon doesn’t feel all that compelled to eliminate the problem, when doing so would cause it a lot of upheaval and cost it a lot of money.

As guild president Doug Preston concludes in his *LA Times* article, “To encourage online marketplaces to improve their practices, the law needs to change the liability structure so that more of the burden of monitoring copyright theft falls on these platforms—not on struggling authors who can barely make a living as it is.”

For now, though, it’s up to us to keep a watchful eye on these platforms to monitor whether we’re being counterfeited, plagiarized, and pirated—and then to laboriously navigate our way through Amazon’s “tools” to get those scams exposed and removed.

Laura Resnick is the author of novels, short fiction, and nonfiction.

September 25 - September 29, 2019



All the final details are pinned down, we are looking at 382 of the best and most exciting people in publishing. Can't wait to see you there!

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We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

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- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



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.

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- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

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Nink Newsletter

September 2019 edition – Vol. 30, No. 9

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Publication: 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.

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