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a professional organization
of writers of popular fiction



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President's Voice

By Wayne Stinnett



December has finally arrived, and with it comes the end of my tenure as your president. I look back to just over two years ago, when I got the first email asking me to serve as president-elect of NINC, and I remember thinking that someone was pulling my leg. I'd only been a NINC member less than two years, and had attended only one conference. After a few emails, I asked for a phone call. After a lengthy conversation with NINC's Central Coordinator Terey Ramin, I learned it was true. They wanted me.

I still thought whoever had suggested me was nuts.

After much soul-searching, I decided I *could* scale back on writing and publishing. I'd reached a level of success I'd never dreamed possible, and I really enjoy giving back to the community. So, I changed my 2018-2019 schedule to just five books over the two years. Yeah, I schedule my writing two years in advance. What? You think the "Planning For Success" theme was made up? My current schedule runs through 2022 and I've averaged 3.5 novels per year. So, it was only a reduction of one book per year. As a full-time author, I knew it would mean my first downturn in income since starting in 2013, but I also knew the margins were well within limits. So, I agreed.

It has been a real honor to lead this organization in its 30th year, and I see great things happening in the future. We accomplished quite a bit. We've streamlined planning and procedures, as well as creating long-term leadership continuity. A couple of things I'd hoped would be concluded didn't happen, but those were things out of anyone's control. The CASE Act is still pending in Congress, and NINC is still working with other writers' organizations to break up intellectual piracy. Anything involving the government or the courts is a waiting game.

I have a few things left to do before turning the gavel over to Alyssa on Jan. 1. As I write this, I'm packing for a business trip. On Monday, Dec. 2, I'm flying from Charleston, SC, to Seattle, WA, then on to New York, NY, before returning home. I was invited to Amazon's headquarters in Seattle to discuss my books and indie publishing, but I made sure to schedule meetings with upper management, wearing my NINC hat, to thank them for attending the 2019

conference and to talk a little about the 2020 conference. On Thursday, I'll be meeting with Audible and ACX management for more of the same. Finally, on Dec. 18, I'll chair my last meeting of the NINC board.

I'm really looking forward to the 2020 conference and hitting the beach once more with my tribe. I hope that many of you will also be returning, and I hope more new members decide to attend. NINC is, without doubt, the pinnacle of professional novelists' organizations and our conferences set the bar for all others.

See y'all at the beach
Wayne

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.

The Mad Scribbler

Context

By Laura Resnick



"There will always be a few people... in every generation who will find my work entertaining and true."

—Noël Coward (1899-1973)

I've been listening to audio productions of some of [Noël Coward's](#) most famous plays, and it's led me to think lately about how our own work, as fiction writers, ages.

Coward, a Brit, was one of the most celebrated playwrights of the 20th century, as well as a successful composer, director, and actor. Widely known for his wit and personal style, today he'd certainly be described as an influencer. One online [bio](#) asserts, "Noël Coward virtually invented the concept of Englishness for the 20th century," and an [article](#) published a few months ago describes him as "a national treasure and one of the wittiest men of his generation."

A prolific author, Coward wrote more than 50 plays, many of which were adapted for film. Quite a few of his plays were revived and produced multiple times; some of them have never fallen out of fashion and are still being performed regularly today. As recently as 2008, his 1925 play *Easy Virtue* was adapted for film (for the second time), starring Colin Firth, Jessica Biel, and Kristin Scott Thomas.

Despite never having seen any of Coward's plays (this is by chance rather than design), I have long been familiar with his public image as a witty bon vivant, quintessential Englishman, and influential writer. I've seen him portrayed as a character in film and TV, and I've watched and read fictional characters that were inspired by Coward's works or by Coward's own persona. He is referenced in numerous movies and books of the past few generations, and a certain style of comedy is still likened to his work.

Additionally, Coward's own statements are a rich mine of enjoyable quotes, such as:

- "Mona Lisa looks as if she has just been sick, or is about to be."
- "I love criticism, just so long as it's unqualified praise."
- "Squash—that's not exercise, it's flagellation."

- “I have a memory like an elephant. In fact, elephants often consult me.”
- “Wit ought to be a glorious treat like caviar; never spread it about like marmalade.”

Anyhow, when I came across this audio collection, produced by [L.A. Theatre Works](#), of some of Coward’s most enduring plays, I decided I wanted to get familiar with his actual writing, especially after all these years of being aware of his influence. As with any author from another era, context is important when considering his work. He wrote the plays in this collection between 1925 and 1941. His characters conduct their lives within—or sometimes in conscious opposition to—the manners, morals, and customs of their own times, not ours.

Indeed, context is why I often feel exasperated with the frequent custom of choosing “creative” settings for the plays of William Shakespeare. I thought, for example, that director Joss Whedon’s 2011 film adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*, which he set in 21st century California, was... well, just awful. To give you just a couple of reasons (I could go on much longer)... Various modern-day American characters here are dukes and princes, as they are in the traditional version, but since we don’t have titled aristocracy, it’s jarring every time such titles are used in this version, which is a lot. The story crisis of *Much Ado* occurs when a male character dissolves into shrieking hysterics because he (erroneously) believes his bride-to-be isn’t a virgin; that works (barely) in the play’s original setting of 16th century Italy, but it just seems ludicrous in contemporary California.

Yes, of course a non-traditional setting is sometimes great for a Shakespeare play, but sometimes it works about as well as serving liver for dessert.

Similarly, context is a challenge that writers face when they adapt Jane Austen novels to contemporary settings. After all, the problem that drives the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen’s most famous novel, is that the Bennett girls *must* marry or they face certain poverty once their father dies. Obviously, this is not a plot problem that has any legs when set in our era, since the solution would be for the Bennett women to go get jobs just like the rest of us. So contemporary stories derived from *P&P* (as well as from other Austen novels) sensibly eliminate it, rather than portraying a 21st century American or English heroine so helpless that she’ll starve if she can’t find a rich husband to support her before her father dies.

Anyhow, in the context of their own era, Coward’s plays were so daring that some of them didn’t even open in London (where they were considered too scandalous) until after they’d been a success in New York. Clearly American audiences were less offended than the Brits were by portrayals of licentious, immoral Brits.

In *Design For Living*, the restless heroine goes from man to man to man, until (spoiler alert) she finally leaves her husband to establish a threesome with her previous two lovers. (Making sure the audience understands how the trio intend to live, her jilted husband furiously describes them as a “disgusting three-sided erotic hotch-potch.”) Given that this play first appeared in 1933, you can see why it raised brows. In *Fallen Angels* (1925), two women wrestle with temptation when they find out that a man with whom they each had a passionate affair years ago, before they were married, is about to re-enter their lives. In *Private Lives* (1930), a divorced couple cheat on their spouses—with each other. In *Blithe Spirit* (1941), quarreling spouses taunt each other by boasting about their adulteries.

Generations later, those all seem like contemporary topics (and you can probably think of some recent novels or movies with similar storylines). This seems rather remarkable when you consider that the American film industry adopted the Motion Picture Production Code in 1930 (and then enforced it more strictly from 1934 onward). That means that while Gilda, the heroine of *Design For Living*, was finding happiness in a polyamorous relationship with her former lovers in the play's 1933 American premier, American movies were portraying married couples as sleeping in separate beds, and the code explicitly warned against any sort of "vulgarity and suggestiveness" around dozens of subjects, including marriage.

Despite subject matter that translates easily to our times (marriage, love, temptation, infidelity, the elusiveness of contentment, the stresses and comforts of intimacy), there are ways in which Coward's most famous plays nonetheless seem very dated—just as there are ways in which a Shakespeare play or Austen novel is very dated. We tend to think of the latter two as "historical" rather than dated, since the authors and their settings are removed from us by centuries, well beyond living memory. By contrast, Coward's stories are 20th century, and his characters ride in automobiles, use telephones, get divorced, and go on jaunts to America. But some of these plays are nonetheless nearly a century old. The language, social customs, and societal values of Shakespeare's, Austen's, and Coward's works are all remote from our own. Yet they all three connect with audiences and readers now—while thousands of writers have been forgotten—through portrayals that resonate across time because they are still fundamental to human experience.

There's a scene in Coward's *Fallen Angels*, for example, that has stayed with me ever since I listened to it. The two main characters are women I don't relate to—ornamental society wives with servants and without responsibilities or ambition. But their dilemma is familiar to almost anyone at any time: unbearable temptation and the guilt that accompanies the desire to give in to it. Will they wreck their marriages and their friendship by competing over their former lover? Or will they do the right thing... and thus never again experience the passion they remember with such yearning? The play is a comedy, and Coward handles this conflict with a light touch, but the stakes are real and the range of emotions the characters go through are familiar to anyone who has ever wrestled with temptation and guilt, whatever the specifics of the situation.

The desperate need to marry—and to marry *well*—is the plot problem of *Pride and Prejudice*, but the story is about the quest for love, having the courage of one's convictions, family, loyalty, and integrity—which it's ultimately revealed the aloof Darcy possesses and the charming Wickham does not. Shakespeare's works endure because he so eloquently captures the eternal struggles of the human condition, in all its infinite variety. And although some of Coward's humor, values, and assumptions are embedded in a distant era—a different context—his exploration of the struggles surrounding love, relationships, marriage, intimacy, trust, and sex are still relevant today.

All stories are destined to become dated, but fiction that wrestles with desires, conflicts, and needs that are fundamentally and eternally human is fiction that may well survive its author's mortality.

Laura Resnick writes novels, short fiction, and nonfiction.

Correction to November *Nink*

It's been brought to our attention that the email address we published in the "What's New at B&N" article in last month's *Nink* was incorrect. While we can verify website links, it's hard to verify emails without sending them. We're not sure if BN reps posted the wrong email or if our reporter, who was writing notes as fast as possible, made an error. Either way, we're sorry for the mistake. Here's the correct email, according to Edie Claire (thanks, Edie!): BNPressAuthors@BN.com.



**PLANNING
FOR
SUCCESS**

NINC2019

Conference Reports

Mastering Amazon's A9 Algorithm & Your Book's Rankings in the Market

Presented by Dave Chesson

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

When readers type words or a phrase into the search bar on Amazon, how does that search engine decide what to show them—and how can authors make sure their own books pop up at the top of those search results? What about rankings—can authors do anything to influence their books' placement on the bestseller charts?

These are the questions that Dave Chesson, creator and owner of [PublisherRocket](#), sought to answer in his presentation on Amazon's algorithms and book rankings. Chesson, who also created [Kindlepreneur](#), a website designed to help authors optimize their book marketing, has worked with several high-profile authors to increase their discoverability and visibility. His products have been recommended by Kindle Direct Publishing as the top in the field.

Chesson explained that indexing is the process by which Amazon selects what products show up for which keywords. Ranking is where those products fall on the list of responses provided by Amazon. He also shared some eye-opening statistics: 70 percent of Amazon shoppers never click beyond the first page in search responses, and 47 percent of those clicks go to the first three books in the search results.

So what affects indexing, and how can authors use that information to increase discoverability? Chesson identified six factors that bear examination: title and subtitle, keyword metadata, the look inside feature, reader reviews, book description, and categories.

The title of a book can contribute to where Amazon places that book, but the subtitle can be even more influential. A concise and subject-relevant subtitle can help refine the focus of the indexing. Specific keywords in the subtitle are indexed 100 percent of the time and increase a book's ranking by 37 percent.

Keywords, which are input during a book's set-up in KDP and include seven spaces to be filled, are a key factor in how Amazon sees that book. A book's keywords are indexed in all orders, all combinations, and all pluralities. The order doesn't matter. The more words included in the keyword boxes, the more will be indexed; however, the book will rank lower with more words included. Consequentially, 'stuffing' the keyword boxes can have an undesirable effect. Also, Chesson recommended not using the book's genre or words that are in the title or description as keywords. When testing keywords, he suggested changing only two out of the seven possible keywords at a time in order to isolate which words and phrases are performing and which are not.

On ebooks' Amazon sales page, there is an option to *Look Inside the Book*. Chesson recommends signing up for that program for paperbacks in order to improve indexing there, as doing so can help refine Amazon's overall picture of the book.

Selecting a book's categories in KDP is very important to the indexing process. Again, those selected categories should not be used in the keywords; however, Amazon is always adding new categories and is indexing seen keyword phrases and displaying them.

It's long been a contested theory that Amazon uses reviews to influence ranking, and Chesson posited that certain repeated phrases from reviews are indeed used for indexing. He suggested that Amazon uses some of those phrases as keywords, after casting aside the review-specific phrasing like "highly recommend" and "in exchange for" as well as the book's title, publisher and character names.

As Amazon also uses words from a book's description in the indexing process, it is not necessary to repeat those in the book's keywords.

One of the biggest mysteries among KDP authors has long been how Amazon determines a book's ranking. Chesson suggested that the formula determines a good match to the genre and is made up of several parts: the degree of text match, price, and profitability; availability and selection; sales history; and conversion.

The degree of text match is related to the keywords in a book's metadata and works optimally with specific matches. Ranking is lower when every space is used in the keyword boxes; it dilutes the match appeal.

Price is a factor in ranking, but it's not a major influence. Chesson advised pricing according to conversion, not ranking. He pointed out that we used to see permafree books at the top of the search results pages, but they seemed to have disappeared now from that indexing.

Having a book available in all possible formats affects ranking, so it is optimal to offer books in ebook, paperback, and audio form for the best performance.

Consistent sales over time make rankings rise, while sales spikes do not affect ranking as much. Chesson thus recommended spreading release sales out over time rather than focusing on just one day or even a few days.

When a keyword is typed in the search bar and the reader sees the product Amazon shows and then buys that product, it causes the rankings to rise. This type of conversion is one of the key elements in the ranking algorithm. When a reader clicks on a product, there may be a slight bump in ranking, but only to the point that those clicks result in sales. And interestingly, there is a direct correlation between conversions and ranking for KU authors particularly, which is most likely an organic result of KU readers preferring KU books.

Chesson shared some interesting research into what elements make a difference on a book's sales page, using the data from a heat map experiment. According to the results, the title, reviews, cover, price, and description drew the most eyes; also, people focused more on three-star reviews than on the higher- or lower-starred reviews. The most recent review received the most looks.

All of the data presented by Dave Chesson has practical applications in setting up books for higher visibility. Chesson recommended that authors consider adding a subtitle that includes words or phrasing reinforcing the genre and trope, as this could help with both indexing and conversions.

In choosing keywords for the metadata page on KDP, he advised using all available letters in every input box except for two, which should be set aside for specific phrases that relate to

the book (setting, time period or other related words). Chesson reminded authors not to use the same phrases over and over, as the redundancy can affect the indexing.

As conversion is the biggest factor in ranking, Chesson suggested paying special attention to pricing, availability, formats, selection/availability and reviews, while understanding that KU authors may see better ranking, simply because readers in KU are more likely to find books in the program more appealing. It's also vitally important to price books to convert.

Since availability and selection can be part of the algorithm, authors who aren't already producing audio books and paperbacks might consider doing so to increase ranking for their ebook sales.

Book descriptions are the biggest factors in convincing shoppers to actually click on the book and buy it right away, which means authors should be thoughtful about what is and isn't included in the blurb.

Finally, when a book launches, authors should design the release with a goal of daily consistent sales over a multi-week period rather than a single sharp sales spike on one day. This gives the book higher ranks and staying power.

Chesson summed up everything he had presented with one simple call to action. In order to sell a book, an author must make readers believe that this book is for them. Every variable that can be controlled should all work toward that goal.

Dave Chesson is the guy behind Kindlepreneur.com, a website devoted to teaching authors about book marketing, and the creator of [Publisher Rocket](#), a software that helps authors see what's really going on in the book market, and thus pick better keywords and categories to help them sell more books.



[Tawdra Kandle](#) is a USA Today best-selling romance author with over 80 books released. Her titles include new adult and adult contemporary romance; under the pen name Tamara Kendall, she writes paranormal romance, and under the pen name Tessa Kent, she writes erotic romance. And yes, she rocks purple hair.

You're Gonna Need a Bigger Story, Part 2: Practical & Tactical Solutions

Presented by Houston Howard

Reported by Nicole Evelina

As we learned in Part One of Houston Howard's presentation, he is an advocate of the concept of a Superstory, a way to diversify beyond your novel to tell different aspects of that same story in varying ways in order to reach different audiences and help you to better compete. Think of it as multiple ways to generate revenue so that if one industry goes down, you don't lose all your profit. The article explained why this is necessary and what it might look like. This is how to make it happen.

Developing a Superstory and its world

There are two aspects to becoming comfortable with your Superstory. The first is practical. It takes skills to be able to tell your story in varying formats. What if you have an idea for something, say a podcast or a graphic novel, but don't have the first clue how to begin, much less have the skills necessary? Howard said the best thing you can do is to get out of your comfort zone and learn new things. You can learn tons of things online for free or for minimal investment. Check out classes on YouTube, Google, Lynda.com, or LinkedIn.com. Or you can collaborate with others who have the skills you need. University film and art departments are great places to start. Plus you can find tons of artists of all ilks (drawing, jewelry making, fashion, illustration, etc.) on Instagram. When you find someone whose work you like, don't be afraid to direct message them about working together.

The other aspect is creative, understanding how your story flows through multiple platforms. Every story, regardless of genre, can be a Superstory, but some are easier than others, just by their nature. But if you plan it to be one before you write, your job will be easier.

The success of your Superstory begins with your story world, the place where your stories happen and it is bigger than you think, bigger than the story itself. Think of the *entire* world of Westeros, the places (and times) the *Game of Thrones* books/TV show didn't even begin to explore. This larger world is what enables George R. R. Martin to have so many spinoffs going at once. The most important thing is that every aspect should tie to the others.

When you're planning your story world for a new book or trying to determine what it is for a published work, ask yourself:

1. **Is the world itself independently interesting?** The answer has to be yes for you to move on. But think outside the box with the rest of the questions before you say no. Almost anywhere can be interesting if you look at it the right way.
2. **Can you remove your main characters and still have something cool and interesting?** Brainstorm other possible characters whose stories you can tell. You might put these into an anthology or tell each one separately in a podcast or dramatic story (like the old 1920s radio shows).
3. **Are there other stories I can tell in other mediums?** You might do a series of short stories on Wattpad, a podcast, documentary, anthology, cookbook, etc.
4. **Is my world a definable location? Can it be mapped?** We all know how much fantasy authors and readers love their maps. But this applies to other genres as well. Think about the town your book takes place in. What are the subcommunities within it? In urban settings this could include the LGBTQIA community, the rich neighborhoods, the slums, the drug culture, drag culture, immigrant communities, a local poetry slam group, etc. If you have a small-town romance, you can probably tell us exactly where the general store/grocer, hardware store, time-honored mom and pop restaurant, and hair salon are. What are the stories behind those places and the characters that people them? What are some of your town's urban legends or founding history (even if it isn't that old)? That's how you will start to get ideas.
5. **Who are other people in my world (outside of the main characters) that I can follow?** Think in terms of groups, not individuals. For example, in Harry Potter, there were a ton of other wizards at Hogwarts whose stories could have been told. Same for the teachers.
6. **What type/segment of your reading audience are you missing?** You can use your characters and other forms of your story to bring them into your world. For example, if you think your story could extend to a younger audience, try adapting it to a YA or Middle Grade version or even a board book or children's book. If you don't have many male/female readers, try telling the stories of the male/female supporting characters.
7. **What are the unanswered questions in your book?** Instead of taking the traditional route of answering them through novellas or a companion guide, answer them through other forms of media.
8. **What have you cut out of your book?** Can that be expanded or repurposed? Again, think of the kinds of things you'd normally make extras on your website or freebies for your fan club or put in a companion guide and expand upon them.
9. **What are you saying thematically?** What can you build from that to create emotional resonance with your readers. Perhaps it is something about motherhood that you could turn into a podcast or an advice column or parlay into op-ed pieces or articles in magazine or newspaper. Maybe you would create your own (likely online) magazine written by a character?

Methods of telling your Superstory

There are as many possible methods to telling your story as you can dream up. Howard has a list in his book *You're Gonna Need a Bigger Story* to get you started. Following are examples and ideas he gave during the presentation.

- **Alexa skills/Alex audio dramas** – Some companies are now acquiring books and screenplays for the sole purpose of chopping them up and making deals for audio-dramas for Alexa, that they will later turn into movies, etc. without the author. All you have to do is Google how to make an Alexa skill and you can cut out the middle man.
- **Instagram** – You could do a visual series about a character or your world.
- **Interactive website/map** – This could be a fun way to explore new places in your story world in a way that you can visually see and interact with.
- **New forms of storytelling** – This issue of *Nink* has an article on our conference session called "Diversify Your Storytelling: Emerging Platforms and Story Formats" that covers several mobile and online options.
- **Other types of books** – If you have characters who are poets, write a book of their poetry; if your character cooks, write their cookbook; if your character is an artist, create a coloring book of their work; if your character is a writer, write their books. You can do all of this under the character's name. Think about the Nikki Heat books written by Richard Castle, the main character in the TV show *Castle*.
- **Podcasts** – Being quickly optioned by Hollywood.
- **Social media** – Don't be afraid to blur the lines between fiction and reality by creating social media profiles for your characters. Pretend they are real people. What social media would they have? Have them do things on it like explore their backstory or hobbies or tell a side story.
- **Wattpadd** – Short stories that are successful here are being optioned in Hollywood.
- **Web series** – Look at the *Lizzie Bennett Diaries* on YouTube to see how they turned a retelling of *Pride & Prejudice* into an Emmy- and Webby-winning series. They are actually a perfect example of Superstory because they kept the story going through social media in between episodes by tweeting as their characters.

Examples of Storyworld in action

The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is one example, but is lesser known than many. What about stories we all (or at least most of us) know? Well, the show *Stranger Things* took a side story about what Will was doing while he was in the Upside Down and turned it into comic book. This is a great example of continuing the same story in a new way. Everything about the Matrix franchise is Superstory. The movies are Neo's story, but everyone else has their story told through other media: short film, video game, book, etc.

Keep in mind that not all of these things can be monetized or that they will bring in loads of income. Sometimes that's not the point; some things are loss leaders meant to engage your audience and build your brand.

I will leave you as Howard left us—by noting that all of this should lead to Alinea, “the beginning of a new train of thought.” Good luck in your new ventures!

Co-Founder of One 3 Creative, [Houston Howard](#) has advised entities such as Mattel, Disney Imagineering, Reliance Media Works, West Coast Customs, Samuel Goldwyn Films and Harper Collins Publishing, as well as designed a number of transmedia-focused projects for Fox, the CW, TNT, Slinky, and the writers of Toy Story.



[Nicole Evelina](#) is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

Scrivener: Not Your Average Word Processor

Presented by Gwen Hernandez

Reported by Karen Fox

Gwen Hernandez's presentation concentrated on the new Version 3 of Scrivener for the Mac. Version 3 is not yet available for Windows. The newest version for Windows is 2.5.

Scrivener is similar to a Trapper Keeper for writing a book. One tool allows you to save not only the actual text itself, but research notes, photos, images, and an outline/synopsis. It provides a means to mark text for future reference and offers a variety of export formats. A file is one project (.proj) and can be stored anywhere: your hard drive, DropBox, external drive, etc. It just requires the Scrivener application to be opened.

Scrivener offers a variety of templates, including one for novel. However, you can also create your own design and *save as template* for future use. The tool saves every two seconds during inactivity as you work and overwrites what was there before.

The opening page for Scrivener features three main areas in addition to the menus. On the left is a column named Binder. The middle is the Editor where the actual writing takes place. The right-hand column holds the Inspector.

The Binder opens with three folders already created: Draft, Research, and Trash. The Draft icon looks like a sheet of paper and holds pointers to all the various text pieces you create. The stored text in the binder can be separated as you choose—by chapters, sections, scenes, blog posts or articles.

Your links, notes, images, photos, descriptions, character information sheets, cover images, and more are stored in the Research Folder. Trash holds your deleted bits of text. You can create as many additional folders as you need. If writing by scenes, they can be selected later and saved into a chapter folder.

If the Inspector is not already open, click on the blue “i” in the menu on the top right to open it. The first view shows your story's metadata. Selecting the synopsis image displays the title pulled in from the Draft name and the various plot points as outlined in the Corkboard. While Hernandez didn't go into the Corkboard, this space is similar to using index cards to plot your novel and you have the ability to arrange them as needed.

You also have the ability to use the Status/Labels at the bottom of the Inspector to color code the status of your novel (in progress, first draft, revised draft, etc.) and color words and lines in the text to highlight point of view, timelines, setting, or areas to revisit. Colors can also be added to icons or documents in the Binder. Both Status and Label allow you to set the color and words you want to use.

The Editor is where the actual writing takes place and works very similar to Microsoft's Word application. You have the option to create split screens in the editor so you can view your text and whatever else you need, such as research material or a character description.

You can view the Editor in Composition mode (full screen) to avoid distractions and style the background for the full screen as well. Using an image of your setting can help keep that in mind while you're writing. You can also resize the document view or move the paper left, right or center.

You can also create a Default Format to be used for all the text appearance while you're writing but don't go into detail. You'll do that when you're ready to compile your document for exportation. Default Format can be found under the Documents->Convert menu. Use it when you import a document and want to set it all to the same format or when you copy/paste pieces of text.

You can also split an imported document with scene break separators, such as #, to break the document into scenes within the Binder. Simply select File->Import->Import and Split, then designate the separator.

Scrivener also counts words for you. You can set it up to count words in the entire document or that day's work or both. It shows a progression bar to keep you informed on your status. Find this under Project->[Show] Project Targets.

Annotations allow inline additions to the text itself. This is handy when you want to check on certain words or come back to a location later. Comments work similar to those in Microsoft Word and place a comment on a page.

Using the search bar in connection with an annotation enables you to Edit->Find->Find by Formatting and pull out text for an excerpt or ads. Note that compile will strip the annotation.

The search field is powerful. Access it via the magnifying glass in version 3 or on the tool bar in version 2. You can define a search, then narrow it in the pull-down. If you click on the title field in version 3, it becomes Quick Search and shows all instances of your searchable word/phrase so you can select the one you want.

Because Scrivener saves as you work, you may want to make a backup at some point before you do revisions. To do this, go to Tools->Options. Auto backup is on by default. Select the zip option and designate a place to save the file. If your working project file is on your hard drive, save the backup to another drive space in a Scrivener Backups folder. You can sync this to a remote DropBox location and set the tool to make a backup when you close the application. More help on backups can be found [here](#).

The Compile feature in Version 3 has been made more visual. Access it from File->Compile. This action pulls together the selected pieces of the document into a format for saving. It can be used to format the document into an ebook (Kindle, mobi or epub), a Word document, txt, RTF, HTML or PDF.

Before compiling, though, a document requires quite a bit of formatting to achieve the look you desire. Once you've selected the output file type, you'll need to select a format from the Formats column to designate global settings such as margins, header/footer, and paper size. After that you'll need to use section types (a value assigned to all files that require the same

format) and section layouts (visual representation of the section appearance) to create a style format.

Compiling can be quite detailed and is explained more in Hernandez's [handout](#). Once you've created a format you may want to use again with another project, you can save it to MyFormats for easier access next time.

Hernandez was only able to hit a few of Scrivener's many features within her allotted time. You can learn more through her Scrivener [courses](#). Use the code NINC19 to get a 20 percent discount on a course.

If you want a copy of Scrivener, you can purchase it from [Literatureandlatte.com](#). Use the code GWENHERNANDEZ with your purchase and save 20 percent on this application.

[Gwen Hernandez](#) is the author of Scrivener For Dummies, romantic suspense (Men of Steele series), and Productivity Tools for Writers, and a contributor to Author In Progress. She teaches Scrivener to students all over the world through her online courses, private training, and in-person workshops.



[Karen Fox](#) lives in the Colorado mountains where she can watch deer and wild turkeys from her office. She's sold nine novels, three short stories, and one novella in the paranormal romance or sweet romance genres. She's currently writing her latest book for the Dogwood Series.

Turn Your Backlist into a Profit Engine: Relaunch Your Novel

Presented by Chris Fox

Reported by Sidney Swanson

The life cycle of a book series

Noting that other products have a life cycle, Fox applies an interesting series of promotions to his series to take advantage of the opportunities present during each period of a series' life. He identifies six distinct promotion periods utilizing this approach.

New release: This period runs in 90-day windows, with a new 90 days added each time a book is released within a series. The period ends 90 days after the final book in the series is released.

Full discount window: After a series has left the new release phase, it enters the full discount window, during which time Fox runs promotions on the series every 3-6 months, Fox drops the series to .99 for each book, noting that eventually the books lose traction.

Once the books in a series have lost traction even with the prices dropped, it's time to create a **First Box Set Trilogy**. He recommends that at the same time, you bundle the audiobooks into a three-book set. This allows you to advertise "Over 20-hour listen on Audible!" Offer the ebook box for .99 until sales lag and it, too, loses traction. At this point, unpublish the box set and move on to the next phase.

At this point, it's time for a **Full Series Box Set**. Fox publishes the entire series in one box set and prices it at .99, leaving the price there. When you release the full series, also release a full series audio, which at over 40 hours (for a six-book set) will be very attractive. Once sales flag on the full series sets, you can either unpublish the set or you could leave it live but raise price to 9.99.

The next stage is to allow the series to lie **Fallow**. During the "fallow" period, don't do more than a \$5/day ad. You can leave the books alone at this point for a couple of months to a year.

Next up? Fox prepares a prequel trilogy that is related to the old series. He will then release the new content and remove the big box if it is still live (i.e., unpublish it). At this time, he does a **Return to the "Full Discount Window."** Sometimes he refers to this as a "re-release," but he doesn't mean the books are literally re-released. They are simply put on sale at .99 each and advertised alongside the new prequel releases.

Ideally, with four or more series, you can keep each series in one of the phases, providing appropriate promo for each series.

The 36-month Refresh: Eventually, after three years or so, all your original readers have passed to other things, and there are new readers who will find your old books attractive. Fox believes that it is better to do what Disney does, and put things back in the vault and then bring things out of the vault.

How to continuously add new readers: building a reader factory

From here Fox moved to a discussion of how and why readers read books. He claims the more you understand these two things, the better you will do. To begin, you must know if you are seeking occasional or habitual readers. Habitual readers buy 30-90 books a month and are more likely to turn to piracy or KU. These readers will burn through your backlist and read everything you write. They also very quickly forget an author's name because six months later, they've read another 100 books.

Occasional readers are extremely loyal to a series (and not author). If you write in four different genres, the occasional readers won't migrate to another genre, but they will tell everyone they know about that series in the genre they like.

Understanding the Emotional Resonance of Our Series

Authors should look at the deeper emotional reasons a reader is looking for in a story. In Chris's case, he became a reader when he was eight and on the back of a milk carton. His mom decided not to return the kids to their dad, and she refused to let the kids go back to their dad. He went to different schools every two weeks. His life was very chaotic. Epic fantasy became his solace. Why? As he read, he started as a powerless person who, through the course of the book, transformed into someone with agency and power. This allowed him to see things were going to get better. Most fantasy readers are shy, not athletic, and lacking in agency.

An author must try to reach readers through what Joseph Campbell calls Symbolic Recognition. As an author, you can bypass the conscious mind and aim at the subconscious. Every word, color, number, etc., is a symbol. Things are stored in your brain when you first encounter them. We have all seen a rattlesnake "symbol" and if we see one live, our limbic system kicks in, providing a series of pre-programmed responses. We will still be flooded with adrenaline even if the snake is just a stick.

Authors can reach readers through the powerful symbols that will hearken back to the early subconscious of their readers.

When a fantasy reader sees a dragon, they will respond to it. Space ships are the most powerful symbol for military sci-fi.

On another level, the word "complete" functions as a symbol which signals to reader they will get the whole story.

Fox invites readers to think about what first attracted them to reading. What symbols were important to you? The symbol needs to be in title, on cover, in blurb, layering the symbol in as many places as possible. Use it in a non-standard way if you can.

To create an oasis for your readers

How well-branded are you? The future is branding.

Content marketing is the best way to first introduce your brand to readers.

Poll your readers to find their favorite character and then create a short story about that character and give it away.

An example is the Critical Role group who sits around and plays D&D and people watch them play. When this group wanted to make an animated series, they raised \$11 million for this in a month.

Fox created an RPG readers can access and includes rewards for readers who finish a book. They can access more information with each book completed. Make the universe as real as possible to your readers. Perhaps you could physically create the jewelry that is part of your story.

Watch *Mean Girls* and note the burn book. Romance writers can come up with a physical “burn book” that readers can check out and read. Thriller writers can geo-cache missing clues for readers to find, and the finders who locate the clues get to be “immortalized” in the next book.

You can make custom Google maps. Show people where the antagonist lives, where the hero lives, etc. Where they get ice cream. The video game *The Sims* will let you create a town and all the characters.

Other authors in the genre are not providing these “extended stays” for readers, and this means it is powerful for your readers. Pick one thing that your readers will love and focus on providing more and more of that for them.

Chris Fox has been writing and self-publishing science fiction and non-fiction since 2014 with 57 titles and counting to his credit. He believes that by understanding the natural lifecycle of a book series, it's possible for authors to turn their backlist into a profit engine.



Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of Young Adult sci-fi and fantasy. Saving Mars was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014.

The State of Publishing in 2019 & Beyond

Panel: Tom Colgan (Penguin USA), Danielle Marshall (Lake Union Publishing),
& Liz Pelletier (Entangled)

Moderator: Lou Aronica

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Lou Aronica asked panel members Danielle Marshall, Liz Pelletier and Tom Colgan ways to describe the current publishing business at their individual houses.

Marshall: My perspective varies. I'm inside Amazon. We are a different organization in that we are a fairly traditional publishing house inside Amazon. It's a very level playing field. It's really competitive now as everyone can publish. [Reporter note: Here she means that anyone can self-publish.]

Aronica: What differentiates you? What's different now than from five years ago?

Marshall: Things rise and fall quickly. [Reporter note: Her publisher is five years old.]

Pelletier: What we do differently at Entangled is that we do fewer but bigger. The days of volume are over. We want to lead or begin a trend. We do a lot of preemptive marketing, even before the book is out or written. However, sometimes it doesn't work. We did \$7,000 in ads and reviewers said they'd give six stars if possible. It was a sci-fi that was acclaimed, but had very few sales: *Red Zone* by Janet Elizabeth Henderson. We thought it was a fresh new voice. But we couldn't break it out. We can't sell it. Book 2, we'll see. Strategic planning is more important than anything.

Colgan: We feel good now. We cut our list in half. We went through rough times. We laid off editors and authors. Discoverability is hard to do. Volume matters. It takes a lot of effort. We will go up a bit. It's a huge challenge with new authors, especially in categories with tried and true authors. We must convince readers that these new authors are worth the dollars they spend on the book.

Aronica then asks them to expand to five years from now.

Colgan: Really no idea. We'll still face these challenges. We've laid the groundwork that should pay off in five years. Something always comes in from left field.

Pelletier: We're doing great. Publishers will copy us. Book packaging. Publishing is much more about collaboration. Most of our authors have print and two digitals at a lower entry point. We helped one author grow her newsletter from 8,000 to 45,000. The idea is to layer. It's fewer plus bigger, longer strategies. My goal is that our authors become household names. Even if they leave, we'll have six books of backlist. Self-pub can be strategic too. Be thoughtful: how/when/platform. You can even do a cover reveal on iTunes.

Marshall: We build author brand across five books. Who they can be develops five books into publishing with us. Less books but sell more and more of those. We will make room on our list for new authors.

Aronica asks what they view as the next big disruption.

Marshall: I'm not the right person to ask that. [Audience laughter at this joke.] We know something's coming. Storytelling has always been around, just in different formats.

Pelletier: I'd love the DOJ to break up Kindle Unlimited. Something needs to change there. Self-pub authors are not making as much as they were. Enough authors will group together and stop Amazon. We try not to play that game. Switch games. Yeah, that was doom and gloom. [More audience laughter.]

Colgan: Six months ago we were worried about the health of B&N. So one positive is about the new approach of B&N. That has moved down the list of worries.

Aronica: What does it look like for self-publishing moving forward at least a year?

Colgan: Looks pretty good. Authors have more cover control. Authors are empowered. Future is pretty bright.

Pelletier: Things have been rough, but those who couldn't make it have gone away. The saturation is shrinking. Quality of storytelling and business acumen has grown.

Marshall: I agree. It was the wild, wild west, but learning has happened. It's an open market to test the waters. Still looking for breaking stars.

Pelletier: I'm looking for hybrid authors. We want great business acumen. We can work together to sell.

Aronica: Now trad.

Pelletier: Great time to be trad. We're making boatloads of money. Focusing on fewer authors gives us more money to spend. It's lower risk per author. Can monetize a backlist. We are much more strategic. We have more conversations with authors. There's more business savvy.

Colgan: Editorial hasn't changed. We've put more energy into PR and marketing.

Marshall: Game changers. Social media is how publishers are reading. We reach readers directly.

Aronica: Giving each of you \$100 million, to spend any way you want as long as it betters authors. [After a second, Aronica gives Marshall \$10 billion.]

Marshall: We are most proud that we have the highest royalty rate. No middleman.

Pelletier: I would launch a children's imprint. We need more feminist children's books. I wouldn't increase the size of list. You're shouting if all books get equal treatment. You must tier and ladder them. I've had author development courses. We've had psychologists who meet to see how authors self-sabotage. We have free brainstorm classes. Tax experts.

Colgan: We have increased marketing and publicity staff. We have reader groups and we get data on trends, etc.

Aronica: Without casting aspersions, what is the weakest link in the industry? What creates the worst complications?

Colgan: Back to discoverability. Browsing is the part we're missing. Used to be great cover and people browsed, stopped and read the copy. People now browsing in a different way. How do we drive people to new authors. I'll spend my \$100 million taking alchemy to chemistry.

Pelletier: Fear tends to expose things and we can tear our industry apart. Fear comes at us—anger, opinions, lies. Writers share things. We shouldn't tear each other down. It's great to share information, but will your information sharing build up or tear down?

Marshall: I echo the sentiments of fear. I hand sell to readers who come to Amazon Publishing. Stories get told, then the stories become fact. We need to focus on stories and readers. I'd like to see more influencers. There are so few people who talk about books; I'm talking about newspaper and magazines, etc. We need more influencers. I don't trust the bestseller lists. I want to read books that move me.

Pelletier: You should want the person next to you to be next *50 Shades*. When there's a Harry Potter, the whole industry is lifted. There's room for everyone when everyone sells more. We lost 25 percent of readers last year in romance. You're competing against Netflix, etc.

Audience Q&A

Q: Futures/Artificial Intelligence. In two years you could feed in all of Stephen King's works and make a book.

Pelletier: Build up your social media to be a real person. Human connections matter. Look for brands.

Marshall: I still do editorial the old fashioned way. Let's say AI becomes a thing. People will still interact with content. It may take a segment, but not all.

Q: I'm a hybrid author. Surprised it took that long to get to hybrid. Authors you deal with will want discoverability, marketing, and shorter contracts.

Marshall: Good thoughts. My own company returns rights. We collaborate more. When you sign on, we are your business partner. If you feel you have an adversarial relationship, talk to publisher.

Pelletier: We have the same goal—to sell as many books as possible. If we do our job and sell books, and you'll write it and support it, we'll want the contract for more than a year. Publishers live and die on their backlist. We just hired an art director from Grand Central.

Colgan: We added a position of publisher of backlists. I get a list of possible reversions. Do we talk to them? We might want to collaborate to do more with it. If you say no, we revert.

Q: Live in reality—Hey, Alexa, Buy X book.

Marshall: We are prepared for that. Every single publisher is right there. Strong reaction to digitizing books. Can't stand in way of content.

Colgan: We are preparing. We have a whole department who look at that.

Q: Self-publishing looking to be hybrid.

Colgan: Know the market. Be brave. Write the best book possible. Good thing to have an agent. Know who is looking for what. Put your best foot forward.

Pelletier: Why do you want it? Real hybrid authors are on two tracks, and they should complement it. They are two different reader bubbles. Self-pub is lower price points, huge concept. Trad is higher but guaranteed quality.

Marshall: Make yourself irresistible. Tell great stories. Know who your reader is. Build a brand and get in that lane.

Q: Debut getting great advance and midlist getting little money.

Colgan: You know that meme with the guy who's with a girl but looking at another one? It's a tough business decision. Here's something we love and it ends up in an auction, which means more money. Midlist (he says he hates the term) track record is huge. Run numbers based on what you've sold. With a debut author we can imagine. But it's not logical. This business is about passion. It's either passion or bean counters.

Pelletier: Think ice cream. You buy Breyers. It's out of stock. You didn't like Dreyers. There's also a new brand on the shelf. Psychology says you'll try the new brand. It's easier to sell a debut. Midlist—try to rebrand whole persona. Must rebrand when we buy a product. Ask, how can I rebrand myself?

Marshall: I've never paid a six-figure advance. The bean counters know the sales track. Note, your level of advance doesn't equal how much commitment we give.

Tom Colgan is the vice president, editorial director at Berkley. Danielle Marshall is the editorial director of Lake Union Publishing. In 2011, Liz Pelletier co-founded Entangled Publishing.



Nink Editor [Michele Dunaway](#) has written 23 romance novels for Harlequin and three for St. Martin's Press.

How to Get Out of a Marketing Rut

Presented by Kilby Blades

Reported by Pam McCutcheon

Kilby Blades has experience in marketing for a large company, and offered her perspective to help authors get out of marketing ruts. First, she explained what she means by a marketing rut. If your marketing machine has never worked, or you're improving but progress is slow, or you're just barely profitable, or marketing makes you want to cry, then you're probably not in a rut—you just find marketing difficult.

However, if what used to work doesn't anymore, you can't scale what does work, you have no idea how to fix what you know is broken, or everything you thought you knew turned out to be a lie and you have no idea what to do next, you're probably in a marketing rut. In other words, you're in a rut if you're stuck in a mundane, unchanging pattern...or if something just broke.

Seventy percent of what throws us into a rut are things we can't control from retailers, ad platforms, other authors, and readers. However, we can hedge against volatility with the 30 percent we can control, such as writing in series or universes, timing releases/doing rapid releases, increasing the size of our library, improving fan strategies and relationships, using evergreen tropes, having a brand/asset strategy, and innovating. She then went on to define several types of ruts.

Rut #1: The Disruptive Event. (such as when Amazon changed the way they display Also Boughts). Your goal is to diagnose what caused the change, so she suggests you isolate the event by figuring out the "when" and "where," exhausting all possible logical explanations such as seasonality. Know your numbers well enough to isolate what variables are driving the change, consult author networks and insight tools to understand the scale of the change, and then test your hypothesis (if possible).

Rut #2: The Hamster Wheel. If you feel you're not getting ahead and want to diagnose the cause of the decline, first, stop what you're doing since it's not working, then rule out the possibility of a disruptive event you missed, go back and audit your problem diagnosis (are you making any unconscious assumptions that are invalid?), then get help if necessary.

Rut #3: The Maze. If you're lost and not sure how you got where you are, retrace your steps and make a list of individual decisions you made, then try to back out of what you did at various pivot points.

Rut #4: The Slow Death. If you haven't been doing much of anything, and sales are spiraling downward, at least you have clean data to start with. Use that data to get to a sensible plan of action.

There are things you can't control, such as market prices for books and ad platforms, evolving keywords, product/author comps, changing audiences, and gatekeepers changing their rules. However, there are things you can control:

- *Ad engagement rate*: Look at your creative assets, timeliness of the ads, audience quality (frequency), and inventory ceilings (the maximum number of people you can reach).
- *Conversion rates*: Look at your blurb and your cover to make sure they are as good as possible, ensure you are putting your info out in a timely manner, and look at your on-page competition at retailer websites.
- *Fan responsiveness* (newsletter open rates, etc.): Look at the ones that received the best open rates in the past and try them again. Also take a look at timeliness and deliverability (are you hitting too many spam filters?).

Don't forget there are some things that are just "par for the course." Sales declines diminish halo-effect sales, you may have hit a natural inventory ceiling so the audience won't get bigger, you may have target audience quality issues (which you can mitigate with capping the frequency and excluding certain keywords), or the product may have become stale.

To improve newsletter email performance, test your subject line, the teaser/preview copy, element placement and performance, content, and the time and day of week you send the email. For ads, test your headline, body copy, media type (still image vs. video), imagery, audiences, markets, and keywords. You could also test the tone, your offers/value proposition, and your calls to action.

But she suggests you not waste time trying to solve a problem you can't identify. Instead, ask a data-savvy author friend, hire a qualified professional, or just start over with a beginner's mind. To avoid getting in a marketing rut to begin with, Blades had a couple of tips. First, create your own dashboard. In other words, create a spreadsheet that will allow you to maintain a constant overview of what's going on so you can see trends. If you're bad at spreadsheets, get someone with an understanding of publishing to create one for you.

She also suggested you create an annotation system for your data so you can remember what you did when, such as specific marketing strategies you tried; the days on which you ran ads, sent newsletters, or did other promo; the days you did price promotions; what platforms you did the promo on; when sell-through was impacted; and the dates a blogger or newsletter featured you. All this will help you see what strategies positively impacted your sales.

To get out of your *next* marketing rut ASAP, track everything now so you'll have better data to diagnose your problem. Put tracking links in your back matter, use affiliate links whenever possible, use Google Analytics codes on your website, use UTM parameters to learn where traffic came from, and use tracking pixels from ad platforms.

If you are still frustrated by ruts, she suggested you change your expectations of the journey and keep a positive attitude. Instead of thinking you just threw money down the drain because your ad campaign targeting a specific author on an ad platform didn't work, consider that you now have learned what not to do—and don't do it again.

Also, she reminded us that you don't have to do everything yourself. If you want to just write, do that, and hire a professional to do the rest. But if you do geek out on this stuff, don't be afraid to hire a coach at key points to help you with things such as performing a professional marketing audit, ensuring your campaigns are set up well, and suggestions on what to do next. And...keep at it. Though you will get better at marketing, it won't get easier. You'll just be faster, wiser, more resilient, and feel more in control in the end.

Blades shared the following link to her presentations for NINC members: <https://www.kilbyblades.com/ninc2019>.

Kilby Blades, award-winning author of many novels, holds an MBA from the University of Chicago and managed more than \$50 million in ad spend as Media VP with a NYC digital marketing agency.



Pam McCutcheon is the author of romance novels and how-to books for writers under her own name, and the Demon Underground YA urban fantasy series under the name Parker Blue. A former engineer, Pam/Parker now works fulltime as a writer, editor, speaker, and in an assisted self-publishing business.

Brainstorming the Future of Publishing

Presented by Matt Buchman and Mark Lefebvre

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Author M.L. “Matt” Buchman and director of business development for Draft2Digital Mark Lefebvre’s set the theme of the workshop as “Look forward, not back. The problems of today lead to the solutions of tomorrow.” Buchman and Lefebvre invited members of the audience to address “what they wanted most for the future of publishing” in specific topic areas, and the audience responded.

[“Audience” represents questions/comments from individual audience members.]

The speakers began with a quick poll of the room, which brought to light a general interest in author direct sales, direct sales of book bundles, and subscription sales as new best practices.

Finding new readers

Audience: To reach new readers, I wrote a book about making a magazine.

Book bundles in a shared universe

Audience: I suggest that you invite a bunch of authors to write a series in a universe. This is best done with two to 12 authors. Draft2Digital (D2D) has a collaboration tool that makes this easy. BundleRabbit.com lets groups of authors build either a loose collection or a single package. BundleRabbit pays out automatically to authors, taking the bookkeeping off their hands. This isn’t a box set of stories, each in the author’s individual universe. It’s a universe shared with other authors. The big challenges are scheduling with other people, and making sure they meet their promotional commitment to the project. If we could get someone to manage those aspects of the bundle so that the project leader authors didn’t have to send out a check, that would be awesome. In such projects, the shared-universe series bundle doesn’t come down [from the retailers after a period], it stays up forever. We need a publishing service that’ll handle those.

Digital book-of-the-month club

Audience: I’d like to see a digital book-of-the-month club—the catalog comes to the reader on time, you get books curated in the genre of your choice, and you get at least one that automatically shows up in your inbox. As with a print book club, you can swap out the ones you want or don’t want. Pick your book, charge it, and boom, it’s delivered, you get it right away. The reader is a member of this club. As with a print book club, if you don’t respond on time to the monthly email, then you get the main book pick, willynilly. This would expose readers to new authors and authors to new readers.

Audio marketing, audio subscription service

Buchman does a subscription service for his novels, stories, and audio. Readers receive a copy when it gets released and they are charged at that time.

Audience: What would a book club subscription service offer that BookBub doesn't do?

Audience: It could supply community, that is, online discussion of the month's selection.

Audience: You could fund the digital book-of-the-month club with ads from the authors who are featured.

Lefebvre: How many of us are going into audio? [show of hands] Wide audio? Direct sales? You should know that you can get into the beta program for [Chirp](#) at BookBub for free.

Lefebvre: Are you reluctant to share royalties with your narrator but afraid to pay the money for full production? Use your short stories. Production is \$300 a pop through [Findaway](#). I was able to make my money back quickly and easily. Suddenly I have a whole bunch of audio properties, which increases my SEO. I'm not going to sell them to Audible, because no one will waste a \$15 credit on a short story. But the stories will sell to libraries, and I get 45 cents per download. Now I can afford longer audio.

Audience [addressing Lefebvre]: You have a good voice. Why don't you record your own audio?

Lefebvre: I did record my nonfiction book. I disagree with Matt. I don't think I can record my own fiction. My Findaway audio narrator had a huge romance following and drew a lot of customers.

Lefebvre: Audio's biggest challenge is that there are limited ways to advertise.

Audience: Let's get Findaway to form an Audio Book Club and use it to advertise.

Audience: Some of the biggest names in indie are moving to a same-day release of audio, which is ready when rest of the formats are ready. This kicks the audio release because the visibility crosses over.

Audience: I do that now. Because my narrator always finds five or six mistakes, I can fix them before the ebook goes to format. The amount of my audio sales has increased exponentially with a same-day release, as opposed to releasing the audio later.

Buchman: Is it better to release the audio edition later with separate marketing campaign? I find that a separate release is more expensive, and I get better sales with simultaneous release.

Audience: You can get some pre-order support at ACX. Entrepreneur@acx.com Load it [sic] in advance. Ask for specific release date. Kobo has preorder and release dates for audio.

Audience: I want to be able to serialize audio. I release a chapter a week in ebook form. I want to do the same with the audio version of the serial on my website.

Buchman: [BookFunnel](#) has announced 20K-word audio fulfillment availability. I would love a subscription tool for that. My subscribers get my short stories a week early, novels two weeks early, but they can't subscribe for the audio yet. Fans sign up for each format separately. And you can't put your content on Patreon, because then they own it. So it's advisable that instead you only put up a link at Patreon. This takes a huge amount of managing.

Audience: I'd like to give out audio ARCs. Does anybody do that?

Buchman: Findaway gives you a chance to give away codes after it's uploaded. BookFunnel can do a smaller file, but not a whole novel.

Audience: No, I want to have [NetGalley](#) for audio.

Lefebvre: Great, let's ask NetGalley to do that. Or use Google Drive.

Audience: I love NetGalley because you get librarians and booksellers—professional readers.

Lefebvre: Talk to the Findaway people if you're distributing audio wide. They can probably be easier to work with than NetGalley.

Audience: Or [BookSprout](#).

Translation

Lefebvre: Who's working with translation? Who wants to get into it—if not at \$10,000 per title? [show of hands]

Audience: The cost doesn't involve just translating the book. You need a copyeditor who is a specialist in that language.

Lefebvre: You need a sales rep in another language, too. Your translator may rewrite your bio for you, as part of the deal. Look into [DeepL.com](#). It's much better than Google Translate.

Audience: I hired someone via [Fivrr](#) to translate my bio so that I can put it up on my non-English-speaking stores. I did it through Babelecube, but I don't trust them.

Audience: You need a trustworthy reader who can double-check your translation.

Buchman: Ask your readers. You may have readers who are fluent in those languages. Offer a free copy of the book for the reader who helps you choose your translator from a series of samples/applicants.

Audience: I hired a translator/ad copy writer to do 20-30 pieces of ad copy that I can A/B test.

Audience: I've heard people talking about [99designs.com](#) for translation.

Audience: Once you're already doing translations, if you've found a good translator, don't tell anybody. [Laughter] I've found the good translators will be happy to translate a German or French newsletter for me and I can trust them because I know they're good; they're happy to do a little job like that for a little money.

Audience: You might want to get a proofreader to proofread your translation. There are always little errors, even in English.

Audience: Who's translating audio?

Buchman: Now we need a service to provide us with translation for audio, and a recording service in that language or country.

Audience: A big network would be nice.

Buchman: There have been a couple of attempts to put this together, but they're very traditionally based. Four years ago, some people at the London Book Fair talked about doing it with an elaborate system, but last year they admitted that their system has become a library of untranslated objects.

Buchman: AI [artificial intelligence] translation is tricky, but the technology that will do it is only 18 months away, and it'll do 90 percent of the job. Ten percent you just need it cleaned up. Voicecraft Synthetic Audiobooks [now known as [Innoetics.com](#)] is well along with this.

Lefebvre: But then the expenses of translation move toward editing, marketing etc.

Lefebvre: I did an audio book using AudioVox (which offers a synthesized voice product). You can get my nonfiction book that way from [AuthorsDirect.com](https://www.authorsdirect.com). I sell it for .99 cents. Jim Kukral has a company called [Vococraft.com](https://www.vococraft.com). He has different AI voices available. This works great if you want the content and you want it fast. You can check out the two audio sounds here. [This is the VoCoCraft computer synth version of the book](#) for .99 cents. The other is here and on all major retailers and library systems, read by the author, full price at \$5.99.

Buchman: Now imagine, you have two audiobooks that you can sell at two different price points, and for a quarter of the price, you can have a synthetic voice for your narrator. Multiple rights to sell and market. I love selling at more revenue streams.

Lefebvre: You'll soon be able to change the narrator's voice the way you change a font. You'll be able to select voices for each character, as if you had a "full cast" audio.

Getting movie adaptations

Audience: What about getting Amazon videos or movies made of our books?

Buchman: I regret to say I made one good shot at it so far. I tried to deliver [to the NINC conference program] a panel of literary scout/producer/indie film people for maybe one or two panels. The problem is that they can't touch IP without risking culpability or liability for theft. They won't touch your books lying on a table. They're that afraid of the litigation. We're still trying to get them to come here.

Audience: Suzanne Brockmann is the authors' idol there. She's producing SAG actor films for \$25,000-\$40,000 made from her own books. The films are getting into a single movie house, but hey, that's a start.

[Voices are raised with names of people who have had deals.]

Audience: [a quick summary of a New York film rights event] My takeaway was that no movie producer is allowed to talk to any IP producer. They're not allowed to acquire from IP producers—only from agents.

Audience: We need a clearinghouse specific to NINC where multi-published authors are in a matchmaking thing with studios. It would have a structure in place to take care of the legal liabilities.

Lefebvre: The movie producers keep their hands off our IP in order to protect their liability. And how do we vet the agents [who might want to come to NINC]? How do we filter out the crooks?

Buchman: I talked to a literary scout. I offered him a catalog. He was amazed; he watches for ideas. My notion was that occasionally [a studio] says, "We need a book like that," and he could pull out my catalog and say "How about that one? And the book has earned a quarter of a million dollars." I chased scouts, but got dead-ended again.

Literary estates, agents, and managing IP beyond the grave

Lefebvre: Octavia Butler's former agent won't release her books unless there's a movie deal. She had no literary estate plan. Kevin Anderson helped Frank Herbert's estate's heirs settle his estate. Matt here has an amazing book about how to set up your literary estate well. It's about the final letter [addressed to your heirs], why you should write one, and why you

should choose trustworthy people who will handle it. The letter is really short and says, “Take this document [listing all of my IP and account accesses] to X person [an agent or IP lawyer] so that they can manage my literary estate when I die.”

Buchman: I want a service that can help me set up a plan that serves my heirs in handling my literary estate.

Audience: Do we need to look at creating a private trust that could manage these sorts of things as a private corporation? A not-for-profit foundation?

Audience: How about a cooperative you pay into, where you’re helping each other?

Lefebvre: How about a service that provides resources, that specializes in staying in touch with the industry about what’s shaking and changing in the business relative to IP management?

Audience: How about someone who can advise your heirs about where the new formats to market old IP will be?

M.L. “Matt” Buchman has over 60 novels, 100 short stories, and a fast-growing pile of audiobooks. Mark Lefebvre created Kobo Writing Life for Rakuten Kobo, Inc; he is currently director of business development for Draft2Digital.



Jennifer Stevenson is the author of five funny series: Liars in Love, Backstage Boys, Hinky Chicago, Slacker Demons, and Coed Demon Sluts.

Deconstructing Fiction: An Example

Presented by Jordyn White

Reported by Laura Phillips

When I sat down in Jordyn White's workshop on deconstructing fiction, I expected a lesson in a multi-step analysis process with lots of bullet points, or maybe a checklist with 10-12 key story points to identify, scrutinize, and pick apart. This was, after all, a craft workshop at a conference of professional novelists with presumably advanced level skills. White herself is the author of more than a dozen novels under two pen names, a founder of the Idaho Editor and Writers Association and a frequent teacher at writers' events.

I expected complicated. I was so wrong, and yet a little bit right.

White's method of deconstructing fiction is a deceptively simple process consisting of two steps. First, ask a specific question. Second, answer that question with the text itself. You define the question based upon whatever it is you seek to understand about a specific work of fiction, or whatever you wish to improve in your own. Simple. Easy. We've all done this. And yet....

In the workshop, Jordyn used the opening pages of *The Hunger Games* as an example. The question was, loosely stated: how did the author unfold the world of *The Hunger Games* while propelling the story forward?

This was, in a sense, a very basic exercise for writers. The experience of this sort of exercise in a room full of multi-published authors, however, can be illuminating. The observations came quickly, and they were smart, snappy, and intuitive. We studied the book's opening pages, one paragraph after another, noting how the author made every word count and pulling out clues about the community, the protagonist herself, and those the protagonist cared for, as well as clues to how the protagonist assured their safety and well-being as best she could in difficult circumstances.

As we moved through the paragraphs, we began to consider a secondary question as well. That is, what did we need to know about this book's world? To understand the big decision the protagonist makes, the one that drives the rest of the story—and those of you who've read the series already know what that is—we must understand something of the politics of the day. We must know about the 12-district structure of government, that the government is oppressive, and the protagonist lives in the poorest district, with obligations and affections that not only prevent her from leaving, but obligate her to care for and protect those closest to her.

And then, drilling down a bit further, what do we need to know about the characters? We know the protagonist loves her sister deeply, which is revealed not in an outright statement of love, but through descriptions of the sister sleeping, of the cat the protagonist tolerates because the sister insisted on rescuing it, and so forth. We discover how the protagonist provides for her family, and the skills she's acquired in doing so, skills which lead us to later believe she can accomplish what she must later in the story.

This book's opening is a bit of an info dump, but we decided that the hints of peril, skillfully sprinkled here and there, make it likely the reader will stick with the story. We decided that info dump laid the groundwork that allowed the reader to care about the protagonist. In this example, every paragraph leads the reader forward and supports the believability of the primary character's significant decision, one so important that it drives the rest of the story. We understand the significance because those early paragraphs we analyzed rolled out the proof, bit by bit.

White mentioned a few other books she'd studied in order to improve her own work in one way or another. One example, *Dating-ish* by Penny Reid, didn't appear to follow the structure White was accustomed to, yet it still worked for her as a romance. So she studied it, deconstructing with the question of how did the author structure the book without a breakup at the 75 percent point, without the clear false high at the midpoint. And more precisely, how could there be a breakup in structural terms between characters who weren't really together? What she found was the 'false high' and the 'breakup' were right there in the book at the expected points, but were portrayed more subtly and in terms that fit the story and characters.

The lesson? Find a book you've read that does what you want your books to do, ask the question, and find the answers for yourself in the text. It's that simple ... and that complicated.

I find it noteworthy to mention that I've not yet read *The Hunger Games*. I find the premise disturbing, and I've been warned by those who know me well that it would likely give me nightmares, the kind which any mother or grandmother would choose to avoid. Yet I'll read it now and risk the nightmares. White's workshop changed my mind. The slow, careful, analytical study of those early pages, among colleagues much sharper than me, proved I've much to learn from this sort of exercise, and from this text in particular. I want to better understand how this author created that world so quickly and clearly, how she shaped the text to turn what could have been a boring info dump into the kind of book opening that sucks one in and keeps the pages turning.

Who doesn't want to create that experience for our readers?

Award-winning author [Jordyn White](#) aka [Donna Cook](#) has published over a dozen books and is co-founder of the Idaho Editor and Writers Association.



[Laura Phillips](#) spent more than enough time with data analysis in her 15 years as the business manager of a niche software company and now prefers to leave the analysis to the experts while she writes and tends to the livestock on her farm in the Ozark Mountains.

Your Story World: Beyond Eye Color and the Weather

Presented by Diane Garland

Reported by Lisa Verge Higgins

Diane Garland began creating story bibles after a novelist commented about the struggle of keeping tabs on details in an ever-expanding series. Harnessing her precision and organizational skills, Garland tackled the problem and developed a simple, effective, and easy-to-use tracking method. Through her company [YourWorldKeeper](#), she now offers her story-mapping and story-bible creation skills to busy series authors.

In this session, she offered tips on how to organize the myriad details into one cohesive unit that can grow with your series.

Why track your world?

In a long-running series, maintaining continuity serves multiple purposes. Check out these benefits:

- Tracking allows for complex worlds to feel more realistic.
- Tracking helps smooth the logistical difficulties of including crossover characters in intersecting series.
- Tracking enhances the development of characters. Instead of repeating details, you can mindfully add new info about a character across many books. Richer characters get the reader more involved in the story.
- Tracking allows you to make your setting memorable and unique. It's a great way to avoid having just another generic town, city, or house-by-the-lake.
- Tracking helps keep the rules of your world straight. This is especially relevant when there are rules of magic.
- Tracking saves you time. By keeping a series bible, you don't have to go digging through old notes to find that one detail you forgot.
- Tracking keeps the story fresh. In series, authors frequently have to remind readers what happened in previous books. Better to do it without repeating descriptions, settings, scenes, or introductions.
- Tracking will keep readers buying. Series readers have great memories. Garland did a survey on Facebook and got 400 responses on the question of how readers keep track of details over a long series.
 - 32 percent do it by memory.
 - 26 percent re-read the series before reading the newest release.
 - 18 percent take notes on the series.
 - 6 percent stop and go back and research if they find a mistake.

- 6 percent ask the author for clarification.
- 4 percent look for a summary or review on Goodreads.
- 3 percent reread sections.
- 3 percent find answers on social media at a place like a dedicated fan group.
- 2 percent wait until the entire series is published and then binge-read so everything is fresh and new.

Tracking helps you hold onto that audience. One of the readers she polled said she loses respect for the author if there are multiple inconsistencies through the series.

What should you track?

Here are some details to include in your story bible.

- **Characters**
 - Physical attributes.
 - Personality traits. Do they need coffee in the morning? What are their "tells?"
 - Likes/Dislikes. This includes food allergies, how they drink coffee, etc.
 - Clothing. Do they work in an office but hate high heels?
 - Five Senses. Do they have a distinguishing perfume?
 - Backstory. Track character backstory as well as everything that is said about that character in each book.
 - Family Trees. Not just who is related, but old family stories as well.
- **Story World**
 - Description. Placing of furniture, parks, office, etc.
 - Map.
 - Directional Information. Is the grocery store "five minutes away?" Who lives "up the street?"
 - Rules Of Your World.
- **Issues Unique To Your World**
 - Sex Scenes. Variety is the spice of life! Keep it fresh.
 - Weather. How many times have your characters been caught in a snowstorm?
- **Timeline**
- **Names**
 - Don't overuse the same ones.

How to track your story world

- **Longhand.** Some authors use notebooks or binders. This is time consuming and cumbersome
- **Excel.** Garland doesn't work in Excel; the cells are too small to type all the info you need. However, Excel is very good at keeping track of names.
- **Writing Programs.** She suggests Scrivener, Google Docs, Word, and Google Sheets.
- **Microsoft OneNote.** Garland uses this software as a digital notebook to track story

details for her clients. She sets up color-coded sections for People, Places, Animals, Timeline, etc. Within each section there are sub-pages for each character, place, pet, etc. It's easy to set up and easy to access.

When To Track

The best time to track is not necessarily before you start writing, or even during the writing process. In the early phases, tracking can take you out of the writing flow. Furthermore, the details you capture may later get cut from a book.

The best time to track is when you're finished with the novel. Then only the details you've actually used will be included in the story map. Diana recommends that if you're hiring outside help to create your story bible, it's best to track details *after* the book is through the entire editing process.

Garland concluded with a quote from one of her clients about the benefits of a story bible.

"The time saved is important, but the continuity of the thought process is more so. For those of us who let a story write itself, it has made writing more fun and less work." ~ Ron Schwab, author of several Western series.

Diane Garland and her company [Your WorldKeeper](#), specializes in the world of continuity. Multiple best-selling and award-winning authors in various genres rely on her system of cataloging and organizing the minutiae and rules of their story worlds.



Rita finalist [Lisa Verge Higgins](#) is an acclaimed author of uplifting women's fiction. Her rum-swilling alter ego Lisa Ann Verge writes historical adventure romance about hot men and dangerous women.

BookBub Ads Master Class

Presented by David Gaughran

Reported by Caroline Linden

If you can't afford or can't get a BookBub Featured Deal, BookBub offers an ad space at the end of their well-known Featured Deals email. Anyone can advertise, and it's perfect for a more flexible budget and schedule. Delivery in an email newsletter that readers have signed up to receive leads to a higher conversion rate, but the ad space does come after the deals.

CPM (cost per thousand views) is a better long-term choice. Unless you are already using CPC (cost per click) and it's working well for you, try CPM bidding instead. There may be more effort required to get it working, but then it is easily scalable and reliable.

The general benchmark of a successful CPM ad is 2 percent for a book at \$0.99, slightly higher for a free book, and lower for a book over \$0.99. BookBub supplies an audience in search of great deals, after all, and who will respond better to deeper discounts.

As with all ads, images must be top quality and professional-looking. Make sure your ad reflects the book(s) you're advertising: tone, colors, fonts, images. What you are offering must also be clear and to the point. [BookBrush](#) and [Canva](#) are two handy tools to make your own ads. If you use Canva, download a high-res print PDF and convert it to a smaller size to get a quality image. Often you'll use the book cover, or the cover art as a background. If an ad is not getting clicked, it's often the fault of the image, and you might be better off hiring someone to create the images. Most designers will supply a variety of simple images using your cover art.

Small changes can make a big difference in the success of an ad image! Consider swapping the colors of text and buttons, for example. Then test both and see which one gets more attention.

The last basic point is to target unique and appropriate comparable authors—who may not be the authors you target on Facebook or Amazon ads. Check their BookBub following in determining your targeting.

Now that you've got some ad images and some prospective target authors, you're ready to start testing, which is where most people have trouble. Run each ad/target combination using a \$15 test campaign for a few days, to get a reasonable set of data. Bid high, to get your CPMs quickly. David suggests iterating targets first, then images. Don't change both at the same time, unless your results are below 0.5 percent; this indicates your image and targets both are not working. If your results are around 1 percent, only one aspect needs work.

A test sample of about 20 comp authors should result in 3-5 winners, which you'll then group together into one campaign. BookBub will report stats for each target, helping you remove and add new targets as your campaign rolls on. BookBub will only serve an ad to someone four times, so a long campaign may exhaust the initial audience. You need to monitor your ads! As always, run a small \$15 test ad for each new potential target before adding it to your campaign.

Strongly consider creating separate U.S. and UK ad images and campaigns, using the correct currency symbols. The U.S. is by far the largest audience and will rack up the clicks much faster. Running a separate ad campaign will ensure UK readers see your ad.

A tip on testing: to streamline your testing and get to your main campaign faster, test a group of target authors in batches. BookBub reports CTR (click through rate) by author, so you can see which targets are not performing well, or which targets' CPC are too high. A CPC above \$0.50 is getting expensive, and you may wish to retarget.

An extra tip on testing: Followers are not necessarily readers! Followers are people who have clicked the follow button for that specific author; readers are anyone who has interacted with the author on BookBub, either by sharing one of their books, recommending a book, or by clicking on a Featured Deal, New Release, or Pre-order Alert for that author. This may or may not indicate a reliably engaged customer. You can see the number of followers on an author's profile, but the number of readers is only visible in the ad targeting dashboard. A readership of up to 50K is great; above 100K, the audience is getting too big to target effectively.

A large gap between followers and readers suggests that the author has had some free books. If you are advertising a free book, this may be a very receptive audience! If you're advertising a book at \$0.99 or higher, they may be less interested. Hence, testing these comp authors as targets is really important. Authors with books in Kindle Unlimited often have this 'free-oriented readership' issue. Historical fiction and Romance are especially affected.

If you're on a small budget, here are a few suggestions to stretch your money. First, concentrate your campaign in a shorter, stronger blitz, instead of a longer, steady campaign. Try targeting your ads to non-Amazon readers, or to non-U.S. readers, which will make your clicks cheaper. The same goes for targeting authors with smaller readerships. You can also try bidding low for your CPMs and waiting it out; higher bids will win early and get served, but eventually those campaigns will hit their limits and tap out, leaving your ad to get served later in the day. Lastly, wait for the weekend, when the traditional publishers won't be launching new ad campaigns. It appears to be somewhat easier (and cheaper) to get your CPMs on the weekend.

If you're going big, consider holding back a portion, roughly 20 percent, of your budget until your ad is testing and working well, and then pour in that last bit of budget to finish strong. It's easy to ramp up your BookBub ad campaign. Facebook ads and AMS don't respond as well. You always want to aim for a more sustained pattern of sales.

Aside from a book on discount, BookBub ads can be used to advertise a group of books—either a group of your books, such as a series, or a group of authors banding together with a special sale. You can also send the ad clicks to your own site, be it a landing page (with affiliate links, giving you some affiliate income to roll back into the campaign) or a direct sales portal. This also allows you to collect pixel data. Be careful not to include too many extra steps for a customer between seeing your ad and buying your book. Since ads usually go directly to a retailer, this is a tactic to use in moderation, and bear in mind BookBub ads require you to associate one book with an ad. It's not confirmed, but it's unlikely you can point an ad to a redirect link.

A special instance of this strategy would be sending the clicks to a series page on Amazon. Not only does Amazon have a helpful "Buy All" button, there are no Amazon ads or also-

boughts on a series page. These campaigns have higher-than-usual conversion rates, which leads to great ROI. You might not want to do this when launching a new book, though, as it will put other books in front of the reader to buy.

Target yourself in your ads, especially after a Featured Deal or any kind of BookBub alert, which generate new followers and readers. You should cultivate new followers, though not at all costs. Contest-generated Followers are not the best quality audience. Better are the ones who've clicked a "Follow Me" button on your website, or via a link in your backmatter. Add a BookBub link to your newsletter onboarding sequence, and even to your good-bye email when people unsubscribe. Let them know they can follow you on BookBub to get just New Release alerts.

For more resources, visit the [BookBub Partners blog](#) for examples of successful campaigns and tips straight from the company itself; subscribe to the (free) Reedsy course on BookBub ads, which is delivered over ten emails (<https://blog.reedsy.com/learning/courses/marketing/bookbub-ads/>); and of course David's book, *BookBub Ads Expert*.

Slides for the workshop are available at davidgaughran.com/ninc2019.

Novelist [David Gaughran](#) has helped thousands of authors publish their work through his workshops, his blog, and his writers' books: Let's Get Digital, Strangers to Superfans, Amazon Decoded, and BookBub Ads Expert. He has also created marketing campaigns for some of the biggest self-publishers on the planet.



[Caroline Linden](#) was born a reader, not a writer. She earned a math degree from Harvard University and wrote computer code before turning to fiction. Since then, her books have won numerous awards including RWA's RITA.

Dead Right: Autopsies for Authors

Presented by Geoff Symon

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

Autopsy and necropsy mean the same thing: the dissection of a corpse. The only difference is the word autopsy is used for human corpses while necropsy is reserved for animals.

Autopsies are performed when there is a suspicious death. Whether or not a death is suspicious is decided either by a coroner or a medical examiner. A coroner is an elected official who is not required to have any medical training. A medical examiner is a doctor who has had training in forensics. Which system is used varies by state and sometimes by county.

The coroner system developed in England in 1194 as a means of tax collection and was an elected position. The office was originally called the crowner, meaning he represented the crown and investigated the manner of death. If the decedent was murdered or killed himself (self-murder), the crown got his estate, which made the manner of death very important, especially to the sheriff, who kept the money. Over the years the word evolved into “coroner.”

In modern times it is an elected position, with job requirements being no more than any elected official; i.e., the coroner does not have to have medical or special training, just as a sheriff does not have to have a law enforcement background to be elected. The coroner’s duty is to publish an autopsy report annotating the cause and manner of death. In modern times, the coroner can also cut open a body if he deems it necessary.

The medical examiner system is more modern. Developed in 1918 in New York City, it was begun as a means of combating the corruption of the then-New York City coroner. The medical examiner is a hired forensics pathologist with strict forensic medical training requirements who (after all tests are done and results are in) publishes the autopsy report annotating cause and manner of death. However, it is either the coroner or the medical examiner who has jurisdiction—never both. It depends on the venue (state and/or county) and who is in charge, but whoever it is has to answer to state-level offices.

Some states are coroner states and some are medical examiner states and some are mixtures of both systems. The job is the same: to do a death investigation to determine the cause of death.

At crime scenes, the body belongs to the coroner/ME. CSIs and law enforcement cannot move or search the body. Anything on the body is the coroner/ME's. Anything away from the body is the police's. An investigator cannot interact with remains or anything on the remains, even with a pen or any instrument. The only exception is if there is a doubt in the first responder's mind as to whether the body is dead or not; he must call the death response team immediately, but can feel for a pulse. The coroner/ME is the only one who can declare the body dead, even if it is missing its head or in other ways obviously deceased. This is also true when there is nothing left of the remains but bare bones.

The coroner/ME is called to the scene for every unnatural or suspicious death. He and he alone decides if an autopsy is necessary. He does not need to consult the family as to their desires in the matter. After the body is released to the family they can hire their own pathologist to do a second autopsy if they want. A forensic autopsy is done/decided on by the coroner/ME and the family has no say as to whether one is performed or not. A clinical autopsy is one requested by the family/heirs and is done at a hospital by a pathologist.

An autopsy is the last exam for the body. The state owes the family the courtesy of finding out what the person died of through a pathological exam. The purpose of an autopsy is (1) to determine why/how a person died, (2) to identify the body or parts, and (3) to provide a final, thorough medical examination of the person.

There are five categories for the **manner of death**: (1) natural, (2) homicide, (3) suicide, (4) accidental, and (5) undetermined.

The **cause of death** is the action that resulted in death, such as gunshot wound, severe electrical shock, poison, heart attack, etc.

The **mechanism of death** is the literal reason for death, which is nearly always they bled to death or their heart stopped. The purpose of an autopsy is to find out the reason why they bled to death (no blood, no oxygen, the organs stop, and the person dies) or why the heart stopped (no blood circulating, no oxygen, the organs stop, and the person dies).

Manner, cause, and mechanism are the three categories the coroner/Medical Examiner uses to determine the cause of death. Their verdict is their opinion, based on the facts they have discovered; another pathologist can come up with a differing opinion based on the same facts.

Autopsy specialties which are generally included in pathological exams

- Photography
- Radiology (X-ray)
- Odontology (teeth)
- Anthropology (bones)
- Histology (microscopic examination)
- Toxicology (poisons)

Steps for preparing a body for autopsy

1. **Photography** – provides a record of how the body and the effects arrived at the morgue. There are four kinds of necessary photographs:
 - a. Superior – closer to head
 - b. Inferior – closer to feet
 - c. Proximal – closer to body
 - d. Distal – further from body
2. **X-rays** – used to be taken immediately, as X-ray film took a long time to develop; now there is more digital instead of film and the results are practically instantaneous. In the military, all bodies are X-rayed immediately to make sure they weren't boobytrapped.

3. **Storage** – the body is put into a cooler kept at 38 degrees Fahrenheit until the next day; this slows down decomposition. Warmer than 38 degrees Fahrenheit will hasten decomposition while colder will freeze the tissues, causing cellular damage. Bodies can be kept in the cooler several days, though it is unlikely this would ever happen—there are always people on call, so autopsies are very seldom delayed. This is important because it can't be planned when someone dies. All autopsies are done in the morning with meetings and paperwork in the afternoon, though this can be changed if the case is very important.
4. **Removal of personal effects** – all personal effects are left on the body until the autopsy starts. The police have first claim to the effects if they could be considered evidence, but if not they are put in storage until they are released to the family. Both the coroner/ME morgue is a secure holding area, and hospital morgues should be.
5. **External exam** – there is a scalp-to-toe exam done before any cutting starts. The coroner/ME makes note of everything he sees on the body—old scars, wounds, etc., on a special worksheet. You can see this worksheet and much more at geoffsymon.com/NINC.
6. **Internal exam**

Note: One of the beloved visuals of TV is for the investigator to use a needle or rod to chart bullet trajectories through the body. This never happens, because doing so risks the needle creating a hole that wasn't there.

The internal exam consists of:

- Y incision – shoulder to breast bone to shoulder, then from the point of the v down to the bottom of the trunk. Now the skin can be peeled back, exposing the interior organs with the least amount of destruction.
- Cutting and removal of the rib cage – there are special shears for cutting away the breast bone and ribs to expose the heart, but most coroners/MEs use a simple limb trimmer from the hardware store.
- Removal and exam of the organs – the organs are weighed, then several samples are taken for various tests. Some samples of each organ are saved for as long as they might be needed. There are some samples that have been in storage for many years.
- Exposure of the skull – an ear-to-ear incision is made so that the scalp can be pulled over the face.
- Skull exam – the crown of the skull is cut away; a notch is made in the back of the skull so that the skullcap can be properly replaced. The brain is removed so it can be weighed and samples taken just like any other organ.

When the autopsy is finished all the organs are put in a biohazard bag which is put into the body cavity, which is then sewn shut. This satisfies all religious requirements of burying the entire person. After replacing the skullcap, the skin is pulled back over the head and sutured, so the body's appearance is normal and there can be an open casket funeral if the family wishes.

Allowing for some differences caused by improved technology, most autopsy procedures have been the same for decades.

Finally the body is transported to the selected funeral home for embalming. Embalming of the remains is not the coroner/ME's responsibility; it will be done by the mortician.

Again you cannot trust TV shows. Time of death estimates are not accurate, not down to the minute and rarely down to the hour. It is lucky if the coroner/ME can guess within an eight-hour window, and it can be off by days. Time of death is only specific if there are unimpeachable witnesses; these would be people who actually saw the death, an unaltered video of the death, or documentation.

Decomposition and the mortises

- **Livor mortis** is lividity. When the heart stops you lose blood pressure and the blood ceases to flow. Being gravity dependent, the blood pools in the lowest part of the body and sets permanently in approximately 8-12 hours. Lividity looks sort of like sunburn, but it cannot be changed, as it stains the skin. Once stained, it's permanent. Lividity can indicate the body's been moved. A body can even have two lividity patterns, depending on when the body has been moved.
- **Rigor mortis** is the seizing of the muscles so they assume an unmovable state. Rigor can be broken, but not easily and only with a great deal of effort. Once rigor is broken, it's done. It cannot reform. If the body is in full rigor but one area is loose, it indicates the body has been meddled with or moved. Rigor has a 24-36 hour cycle dependent on temperature and/or location. Usually rigor goes in an approximately eight-hour cycle: sets in eight hours—lasts for eight hours—releases in eight hours.
- **Algor mortis** is the cooling of the body until it reaches the ambient temperature. Coroners/MEs measure the body's temperature with a probe, usually put into the rectum. The probe being thrust into the liver is no longer done, as it adds to the injuries of the body. Time of death by this method is dependent on the estimates of how long it takes for 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit to reach the environmental temperature. The general rule is 1-2 degrees per hour. Algor mortis is the worst way to determine time of death.

Temperature will affect the accuracy of all the mortises.

Entomology

This uses bugs to estimate the time of death by the stage of the insects found on the body. Blowflies can arrive soon after death and lay eggs in orifices and open wounds. In 24 hours the eggs hatch into stage 1 larvae (maggots). In 24 more hours, they become stage 2 (bigger) maggots. In 23 more they become flies. This is not an accurate method of determining time of death, as no one can know exactly when the parent bug landed on the corpse.

Vitreous fluid is drawn from the eye to determine potassium levels, from which an estimate of time of death can be made. This is a very inaccurate test.

The coroner/ME can estimate how long a person has been dead by how the stomach contents are digested and sometimes have an idea of what he has eaten. It is not an accurate or dependable way to determine time of death.

For the forms used by coroners/MEs, a detailed handout and more information, please visit Symon's website: geoffsymon.com/NINC.

Symon has written three very informative Forensics for Fiction books for writers: *Autopsies*; *Blood Spatter*; and *Crime Scenes*.

Geoff Symon is a 20-year federal forensic investigator with direct, firsthand experience investigating cases including murder, suicide, arson, kidnapping, bombings, sexual assault, child exploitation, theft and financial crimes. He has specified and certified training in the collection and preservation of evidence, blood spatter analysis, autopsies and laboratory techniques.



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a 7th-generation Texan and a 3rd-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Janis and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

The Silent Killer of Author Business: Disregarding Cash Flow

Presented by Jordyn White

Reported by Nicole Evelina

Most of the time writing and math don't mix well. There is something about writers' brains that turns us off of numbers. But that can be a career killer for us. If we don't manage our money well, we are way more likely to fail at our business and possibly even go bankrupt.

Author Jordyn White developed an easy method to keep track of income, expenses and forecast cash flow. It will even work for people who don't think they are good at finances or math! She does want everyone to know that she is not a financial advisor or tax expert and her advice should not be taken as such.

Why we fear money

We are hardwired to fear either not having enough or not being enough. Back in the cave man days, the lizard part of our brain protected us from being ostracized (and in turn dying) by our tribe, which provided food, shelter, and protection. Because of this, we developed a sensitivity to what others think of us.

We don't really need that anymore but our biology still uses this throughout our lives. Money is the new thing that keeps us alive, so that fear-based part of our brain still functions the same.

Personal learnings about money

White has personally been affected by financial difficulty and turned it around by learning about cash flow and using the tool we'll talk about later. She also learned that the key to being financially secure is changing how you think about money. You can control the money, rather than it controlling you. She recommends the book *What Happy People Know* by Dan Baker and Cameron Stauth as a starting place for thinking differently.

Resources are always finite, but our wants are infinite. You are always going to want more. But that is not enough of a reason to get it if you can't afford it. If you can't have \$10 and not spend it, you're never going to have \$100. If you can't have \$100 and not spend it, you'll never have \$1,000. If you can't have \$1,000 and not spend it, you'll never have \$10,000. You have to be willing to let your money work for you somehow—cash flow can show you what you have to work with.

What is cash flow?

Cash flow is a huge contributor to business failure, but it can also be used as a weapon against anxiety around failure and money. The first terms that usually come to mind when we hear cash flow are:

- Expenses – money going out
- Revenue – money coming in
- Profit – what's left
- ROI – return on investment

But none of that is cash flow. Cash flow gives you information to make decisions in your business. It is different from a traditional budget for a few different reasons.

Traditional monthly budget:

| Monthly Budget | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Estimated average income | \$ | 400.00 |
| Expense 1 | \$ | 150.00 |
| Expense 2 | \$ | 75.00 |
| Expense 3 | \$ | 115.00 |
| Expense 4 | \$ | 10.00 |
| Total expenses | \$ | 350.00 |
| Remainder | \$ | 50.00 |

Just writing up a monthly budget like the one above often doesn't work because those numbers don't account for change from month to month nor the money you started with. One key element of cash flow is being able to see your running bank balance from month to month, as in the example below.

| Cash Flow | | Running balance | |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| January | | Opening balance | \$ 1.00 |
| Projected income | \$ 400.00 | | |
| Projected expenses | \$ 350.00 | | |
| Remainder | \$ 50.00 | | \$ 50.00 |
| | | End of month balance | \$ 51.00 |
| February | | | |
| Projected income | \$ 400.00 | | |
| Projected expenses | \$ 350.00 | | |
| Remainder | \$ 50.00 | | \$ 50.00 |
| | | End of month balance | \$ 101.00 |
| March | | | |
| Projected income | \$ 400.00 | | |
| Projected expenses | \$ 350.00 | | |
| Remainder | \$ 50.00 | | \$ 50.00 |
| | | End of month balance | \$ 151.00 |

Cash flow is more accurate than a budget because it allows you to account for ups and downs in expenses or income and project out far enough that you are stabilizing your budget. Cash flow uses your monthly, quarterly, annual, and one-time expenses to help you see what is coming and confidently predict when you can add new expenses safely.

| Cash Flow | | Running balance | |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| January | | Opening balance | \$ 1.00 |
| Projected income | \$ 390.00 | | |
| Projected expenses | \$ 350.00 | | |
| Remainder | \$ 40.00 | | \$ 40.00 |
| | | End of month balance | \$ 41.00 |
| February | | | |
| Projected income | \$ 400.00 | | |
| Projected expenses | \$ 410.00 | | |
| Remainder | \$ (10.00) | | \$ (10.00) |
| | | End of month balance | \$ 31.00 |
| March | | | |
| Projected income | \$ 410.00 | | |
| Projected expenses | \$ 340.00 | | |
| Remainder | \$ 70.00 | | \$ 70.00 |
| | | End of month balance | \$ 101.00 |

How to track your cash flow

You can use anything that works for you, whether that is paper or fancy software. White emphasized that no one tool is right for everyone, so go with what you'll use. Options include programs like QuickBooks, apps like Spendee, or an Excel spreadsheet you design or one designed by others.

She demonstrated an Excel spreadsheet she developed. It includes a banking ledger that automatically populates the cash flow tracking sheet and accounts for both actual and upcoming expenses. Her tool also creates an annual income/expense statement, among other things.

Her system is available through her Teachable course [Easy Money Mastery + Powertool](#) (which she teaches under another author name). The course demos the tool and gives the cash flow crash course she shared during the workshop.

Ready to start?

1. **Stay calm.** It's really easy to freak yourself out over money. If you do, that is totally normal. Just step away for an hour, but no more than a day so that you actually finish your task.
2. **Put your transactions into a ledger** or copy/paste from your bank. You can do this by hand. If you use software like QuickBooks or other tools, these may allow you to connect to your bank account and flow the information automatically. If you've never tracked your expenses, you might want to look into an app like Spendee that can help.
3. **Create your initial category setup.** Use whatever fits you and your situation. It's okay to start small and simple and build as you go. The examples below are what White uses in her automated Excel system.

You can go **simple** with something like this for **income and expenses**:

- 100 – Income
 - 101 – Books
 - 102 – Other IP
 - 103 – Services
- 400 – Expenses
 - 401 – Salary
 - 402 – Taxes
 - 403 – Marketing
 - 404 – Production (covers, ISBNs, etc.)
 - 405 – Operations (ink, books, etc.)
 - 406 – Other

Or you can be more **detailed** like this for **income**:

- 100 – Book royalties
 - 101 – KDP
 - 102 – D2D
 - 103 – Kobo
 - 104 – Events (ebook)
 - 105 – Other digital
 - 106 – Lightning Source
 - 107 – Ingram Spark
 - 108 – Events (print)
- 200 – Other IP Income
 - 201 – Courses
 - 202 – Licensing
 - 203 – Misc.
- 300 – Editing and services
 - 301 – Manuscript evaluations
 - 302 – Hourly editing
 - 303 – Contract work
 - 304 – Misc. editing
 - 305 – Speaking fees
 - 306 – Consulting
 - 307 – Systems creation

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- And you can be **detailed** for **expenses**:
- 400 – Book cost of sales
 - 401 – Title setup fees
 - 402 – Print orders
 - 403 – Editing expenses
 - 404 – Cover design
 - 405 – Cover illustrations
 - 406 – Licensed IP covers
 - 407 – Formatting
 - 408 – ISBNs
- 500 – Ads and promo
 - 501 – AMS ads
 - 502 – FB ads
 - 503 – BB ads
 - 504 – Other paid ads
 - 505 – Ad services (BF, BS, SQ)
 - 506 – Email services (MC)
 - 507 – Giveaways

- 508 – Promo items
- 509 – Licensed IP promo (pics, fonts)
- 510 – Convention/show fees
- 511 – Convention travel
- 512 – Marketing team
- 600 – Operating expenses
 - 601 – Salary
 - 602 – Taxes
 - 603 – Office supplies
 - 604 – Shipping/PO Box
 - 605 – Books, media
 - 606 – Working lunches
 - 607 – Business meetings
 - 608 – Local parking
 - 609 – Fees (PP, Square)
 - 610 – Opex (BR, Dropbox)
 - 611 – Vas
- 700 – Platform and development
 - 701 – Professional memberships
 - 702 – Professional development (conferences)
 - 703 – Professional development (travel)
 - 704 – Professional development (meals)
 - 705 – Creative development (courses)
 - 706 – Website (domain, email)
 - 707 – Software subscriptions (PS)
 - 708 – Platform/opex services (ME, BF, BS)
 - 709 – Website development (copy, etc.)

1. **Create your initial cash flow projections.** Start with what you know, make your best estimates, and tweak as you go along. No stress! She projects out six to eight months, but again, do what you are comfortable with.
2. **Add/delete categories yearly as needed.**

Ways to use cash flow as a tool to benefit you

- **Remember that your projections are not the 10 commandments** and you can change as needed. Needing to do so doesn't mean you are a failure.
- **Evaluate the past to change the future.** You can look at where you were spending money to see if you can change things. For example, if you are spending X amount for a VA, are you getting that much and more back? You might see things that aren't worth doing.
- **Consider all types of cash flow,** include monthly, quarterly, annually, and one-time income and expenses.

- To counteract the lizard brain, **use auto payments** for as much as possible: expenses, savings, and your fun money.
- You have to **have some fun money** or you'll bust your budget.
- Also, make sure you **have a cushion for the unexpected**.
- Your ability to project accurately improves over time. First year is the hardest. It is best to underestimate your income and overestimate your expenses to account for fluctuations.

Try cash only for a year

This may sound crazy and nearly impossible, but White has done it. She recommends using cash only for your expenses for at least a year because it teaches you the difference between a need and a want, how to be resourceful and to plan ahead. Plus, it saves you a lot of money in interest.

Be your own emergency fund. Put money in the bank and you aren't paying interest like you would on a credit card. But don't touch it—that defeats the purpose!

White started her cash-only commitment when she was living paycheck to paycheck with no savings and kept it up for 10 years. You don't need to be financially stable to benefit from cutting up those cards.

Exceptions: Cards with points for flights or other rewards are worth it once you are disciplined. Only use these cards if you can pay off the balance at the end of each month. Sometimes large purchases, such as homes and vehicles, can be exceptions to being debt-free, depending on your situation.

If you learn to live on cash alone, you will mentally approach big expenses smarter.

Pro tip: White recommends automatic deposits into an emergency savings in a bank account that's inconvenient to access (for example, an online account with a complicated password you don't have memorized). This keeps it out of sight, out of mind, and makes it easier for savings to accrue.

An audience member recommended purchasing an Amazon gift card at the beginning of year to use for business books. That will help you avoid going over your budget and also keep money off your credit cards.

To learn more

If you want to learn more about business money management and how you can take control of it, White recommends the book *Profit First* by Mike Michalowicz. The system described in that book may or may not work for you, but the principles are great.

NINC attendees who have questions about cash flow are invited to contact her at any time. She's passionate about helping authors turn their finances around and is happy to provide any information or encouragement that would be helpful. Reach out at jordynwhitebooks@gmail.com.

Remember that a basic comfort level with money is empowering. That is the whole point of all of this, besides helping make you a more successful author.

Award-winning author [Jordyn White](#) aka [Donna Cook](#) has published over a dozen books and is co-founder of the Idaho Editor and Writers Association.



[Nicole Evelina](#) is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

The Advanced Fiction Keyword Strategy That Impressed Even Amazon

Presented by Dave Chesson

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Dave Chesson is the guy behind Kindlepreneur.com, a website devoted to teaching authors about book marketing. Recommended by Amazon KDP as the place where you can learn how to “optimize marketing for your books,” Kindlepreneur has grown to be one of the largest book marketing websites. Chesson is also the creator of [Publisher Rocket](#), a software that helps authors see what’s really going on in the book market, and thus pick better keywords and categories to help them sell more books.

“We don’t make money when we sell things. We make money when we help customers make purchase decisions.”

— Jeff Bezos

Authors need to do that, too. Nobody will come back to you (or to Amazon) if you show the wrong book to the customer. This workshop explained how authors can help Amazon show the right books to the right customers.

A year ago, Chesson wrote an article about analyzing Amazon for keyword use. The structure of his plan helps authors select keywords for their novel, in order to help them sell more. Amazon’s FAQ subsequently reflected his advice.

There are five useful keyword types: setting, character types, character roles, plot themes, and story tone. Most authors do only one of these three steps: identify keywords, get indexed, and improve rankings. Chesson applied data science to keyword searches.

If you rank No. 1 for a keyword, statistically speaking, 27 percent will click on it. That percentage drops dramatically as your book places lower on the list. Book No. 1 gets two times more clicks than No. 2. If your book is ranked No. 40 for a given keyword that means you’re not benefitting, from a business perspective, from that ranking.

What are keywords?

Keywords are words your shopper uses when they think of their ideal book. The best way to convince somebody to buy your product is to describe it using the exact words your shopper uses to search for it.

In nonfiction, there are four areas to find customer wants: pain points (problems), results or a solution, emotions, and demographics. The demographics area is very strong in nonfiction.

Fiction-style descriptive keywords

Customers describe what they are looking for in terms of four things: time periods and settings, character types and roles, plot themes and special events, and style and tone of genre. Shoppers put together these sorts of keywords in a string to find their ideal book to buy.

Identifying keywords

To generate ideas for sales copy, create an ad, or otherwise market your book, first identify the words shoppers use to find their ideal books, then find the words shoppers use to buy their ideal book, then find words that aren't too competitive (that have fewer books identified with them).

Step 1, write these five areas down, in five columns:

- Settings and time period
- Character types, roles, abilities
- Plot theme
- Special situations and events
- Story tone

Settings and time period

The shopper may not know what period you're in exactly, or what they want exactly. But you, and they, will find clues that point to "Victorian" or "Regency." Even in a modern setting, location matters: for example, small town vs. urban locations. Make a huge list generating those ideas relating to your setting/period.

Character types, roles, abilities

Characters are special: what's their motivation, what's their backstory, what's the tone of their voice, are they werewolves? Single mom, rape victim, cop? In military science fiction you can describe a soldier in a dozen ways with a dozen genre-specific terms.

Take this Amish girl on the cover. Is she a rebellious Amish girl, or one who falls in line, or one who has lost her people? Expand on her Amish identity.

Plot theme

What is the general description of the story itself? Summer vacation, war, love story between enemies, interracial marriage? How do we describe that?

Special situations and events

Special events are catalysts. What causes the story to progress? Climate change, war, a stalker attack, a plane crash?

Story tone — the flavors of love

How can you describe the sub-sub-genre you're in? In romance, we have a range, from wholesome to Christian to all the way over into hot and steamy, to erotica, even further. Describe your flavor. Second chance, holiday romance, what else?

Let's look for phrases

You have created a page of five columns, five lists of words that are included in books you've written or read and enjoyed. Prune the list, pair the words up in phrases to match what you do.

What makes for good keywords?

Again, great keywords are words shoppers use, words shoppers use to buy, and words that aren't too competitive.

Words shoppers use: this is what they type into the search bar. Go ahead and try it. Start typing a keyword. Amazon tries to guess which ones you might want; it shows you a drop-down list of them.

Beginning with the lists you've generated, start putting those words or phrases into the search bar. Amazon helps us fill that out. Use their suggestions to add to that list. You'll find new keywords you never thought of. If you add new letters to the first word, it gets interesting.

Words shoppers use to buy: Make sure that the books that appear for that keyword are actually making sales. If the book isn't selling, that doesn't mean that the keyword is why that book didn't sell. It could mean that the book showed up because it was a new launch, or something odd. But if there are no sales at all on that top book? That's possibly not a good keyword.

Words that aren't too competitive: There are lots of reasons why it's inadvisable to use a keyword. Is the author famous? What's the book cover quality? How many reviews, what's the quality of the reviews? The book description, the age of the book, the keyword in the title, the author's blog or other online assets, their knowledge and marketing skills, the frequency of this keyword's appearance in promotions or advertising—all these factors can make a keyword too "big" to be useful.

A software alternative to this process is [Publisher Rocket](#).

Keywords in action: potential organic Amazon keywords

When shopper chooses "science fiction," they're not going to find their ideal book. That's too broad for the shopper. Start with "science fiction" and start drilling down, adding more search terms. "Man with magical powers," for example, gives us "wizard, mage, warlock, sorcerer, magician, enchanter." Come up with synonyms for your character's power, its power and strength.

Look at phrases composed of keywords, such as romance, romance and sex, second chance romance, second chance romance with baby, Victorian second chance romance, Victorian sex, billionaire romance, millionaire romance, alpha male romance, possessive alpha male romance,

or rich man romance. “Second chance” doesn’t score as well as “second chance romance with baby.” “Alpha male” works better than “billionaire.”

These keywords are getting in tight. Now you have to ask, Is this word or phrase a good fit? Is that what you want your book connected to? Find out which books are the ideal fit.

Pick the words in each type of keyword that are most successful (the books associated with them have good rankings) and get most match for your books.

Getting indexed

There are five ways to get indexed on Amazon: keyword metadata, title and subtitle, Look Inside, categories, reviews, and descriptions. We can only affect two of them: keyword metadata, and title and subtitle.

We’ve created a list of keyword ideas in five columns. We’ve honed and pruned the list based on what’s working on Amazon. We’ve found some we think are a perfect fit for our book.

At Chesson’s workshop “Mastering Amazon’s A9 Algorithm and Your Book’s Rankings in the Market,” he talked about ways Amazon indexes your book. Today he focused on keyword metadata, and title and subtitle. They’re the ones we have control over.

Seven keyword spaces

Amazon indexes you for all of those seven “words,” in every combination. The more characters you put in, the more your book shows up. But he’s also found that if you put in more characters, it reduces your rankings.

So should we put in only specific phrases? Or should we use all the words? He thinks we should do both.

If you’ve identified four or three or two or one great phrases, just put one phrase in one of the seven boxes. But for the other the seven spaces, fill them all in. Amazon may find a combination you may not have known about, one that works better for you.

Subtitles

Subtitles play a significant part in indexing. When a book has a keyword in its title or subtitle, it is indexed 100 percent of the time, and an increase in 37 percent of rankings over when that keyword wasn’t in the title or subtitle. The indexing is much better if the keyword is in your title or subtitle than if the same keyword is just in your keywords. Title and subtitle are much more influential in affecting your rankings.

We’ve identified our keywords. We’ve placed them in the title or subtitle. Now let’s improve our rankings.

Rankings

No. 1 gets twice the traffic of No. 2. That distinction counts. Turning up on the second or third page of search results doesn’t help. If you end up below the first page in a keyword search, you know that keyword isn’t helping.

Keyword conversion

Conversion means “conversion to paying customer.” It means that the shopper buys your book. The conversion process goes like this: the shopper types a keyword in, books show up on the search list, the shopper buys the book. There is no greater way to affect ranking than conversion, when someone uses the right keyword to find your book and then they buy it.

Here’s a great way to temporarily increase your indexing. Don’t tell the bots and crooks!

Get three to 10 people to purchase the book using your keyword path. You’ll get to the top of the search page immediately. But after natural shoppers start choosing, your book will fall to where it should be. This is not a hack because it doesn’t stick. This strategy will boost you temporarily, but eventually Amazon’s A9 algorithm will put you where you should be, unless all the non-three-to-10 buyers use that keyword too.

This action will give you an opportunity to earn your spot. How do you stay in that spot?

More about subtitles

“I believe subtitles help in conversion rates,” Chesson said. “They convince a shopper to click.” He examined two book examples:

- *Temple of Sorrow: A LitRPG and GameLit Adventure (Stonehaven League Book 1)* by Carrie Summers. From the cover it looks like any other fantasy novel. But by putting the specific LitRPG tag (GameLit) in the subtitle she conveys its specific fantasy subgenre.
- Sandra Brown’s *Outfox*. The title doesn’t help with indexing or discovery. What if Sandra Brown wasn’t famous? If nobody knew who she was, if they didn’t know what she writes, would they know from the cover whether it was a crime thriller, a mystery, a literary novel? A shopper will probably scroll past if there’s nothing to indicate genre.

Chesson: “If you confuse, you lose.”

- *Gideon the Ninth* by Tamsyn Muir. The cover shows us a skeleton-faced human figure maybe surrounded by flying swords and bones. Is this a necromancer fighting dark magic, is it a warlock, what kind of book is it?
- *Hitch* by CJ Petit. We have here a picture of guy on horse—a cowboy?—silhouetted against a sky full of fireworks. Civil war maybe? This person may have used good keywords, but the cover isn’t helping me click on it. And the title isn’t helping either.

Use a subtitle to legitimately inform your shopper concisely and clearly what they’re getting.

Q: Do we put the subtitle on the cover?

A: Yes and no. It seems like the Amazon Terms of Sale say you have to; but it’s vague. I have a whole podcast on that. But we do see a lot of books that don’t have the subtitle on the cover and they’re NYT bestsellers. I put my subtitle on there, but I make it really small, so it doesn’t confuse the reader or take up any real estate. There are graphic ways to make it look nice, too. But a lot of them seem to get past Amazon just fine.

Book descriptions

Use the keyword lists you have come up with to write your book description. It's a puzzle. Fit them all in there somewhere. This list was built by finding the words shoppers use when they go looking for your [type of] book, so they're your friends.

Send your list of keywords to your cover designer to make sure those elements are in the cover.

Put the subtitle in tiny print on the cover in a fadey color, to cover your bet with the TOS with Amazon.

Book launch tactic

Have your three-to-10 purchasers use the keyword tactic discussed. Give them your target keywords. Your sales efforts will help you stick even longer. This tactic helps spread the sales out. All your rankings for all your keywords will rise. If you're already No. 1 for those key phrases, you will stay there. Your stickiness will stick longer. Your weakest keywords will rise in rank too.

Q: When you send those three-to-10 people to buy your book on those keywords, should you do it on launch day?

A: Yes, or one, two, or three days into launch period. Then when others search, they'll find the book.

Q: Is it enough that they click? Or do they have to convert?

A: They must convert. Sales and downloads matter. (If you're KU, a download affects your rank just as much as a purchase.)

Q: If you type in a keyword and find my book, sometimes you'll find the audio or paperback instead of the ebook.

A: I have no data why that is, but I'm looking into it.

Chesson: "I think [the keyword finds a book format because] it's what Amazon thinks is converting the most. They think that this is the format most likely to sell. I think that's how they think. I have no evidence or hard information yet."

Keyword changing tactic

Change two blocks of keywords (fields) at a time. Test to see how it goes for about a week. Change those keywords back if the book's rank goes down, or, if the rank increases, move on to the next blocks of keywords. Change only two at a time so you know which ones are really working—A/B comparing research geeks might say; change only one at a time.

Mistake: cover doesn't match

If your hero is a wizard and your cover is a necromancer, you won't sell it.

Mistake: too broad and non-symbiotic

The Essential Writing Structure. The author used these keywords [keyword phrases]: "How to write blog posts," "How to write speeches," and "How to write an essay." If you target these keywords, you'll get three different groups of books. These keywords don't match the book's content exactly. They're too broad to help you find a book called *The Essential Writing Structure*. If you want something more specific than this title indicates, you won't buy.

Q&A

Q: About indexing: how often do books get re-indexed? Say you change the keywords. How long does it take Amazon to update the indexing?

A: From experience, I'd say less than 24 hours.

Q: When you write in a series, should you keep the keywords from book to book?

A: My recommendation, without data, is that when you find phrases that particularly work, use them for all books, but leave some of the keyword blocks open to make each book unique in the indexing as well.

Q: You know how the No. 1 book in search results takes the majority of clicks—is that even when there are sponsored books that appear above your search results?

A: You're asking, how do those sponsored books change the click rate? I believe it does change it a bit, but I think shoppers are starting to tune it out. Amazon has been changing it up a bit. Sometimes we see the series at top, then the sponsor. We don't know yet.

Q: Does the order of seven keywords affect the effectiveness? Suppose I put GameLit first, and then Wizard at the bottom. Will it index at GameLit first?

A: I.e., you're asking, does box No.1 get more weight than box No. 7? No. Not that we saw.

Q: Is there an easy way to crawl for data?

A: No, it's really expensive. It's important for authors to see where they are ranked and what affects that.

Q: Why not change one keyword at a time, not two?

A: You can do that, but you want to give it a week, so that'll take a long time. But you can definitely do it one keyword at a time.

Q: How does Prime reading affect my rankings?

A: If your book is in Prime reading, you'll probably have better rankings.

***Dave Chesson** is the guy behind Kindlepreneur.com, a website devoted to teaching authors about book marketing, and the creator of [Publisher Rocket](#), a software that helps authors see what's really going on in the book market, and thus pick better keywords and categories to help them sell more books.*



*[Jennifer Stevenson](#) is the author of five funny series: *Liars in Love*, *Backstage Boys*, *Hinky Chicago*, *Slacker Demons*, and *Coed Demon Sluts*.*

Surviving (and Thriving!) in Traditional Publishing

Panel: Victoria Thompson, Charlotte Hubbard, & Susan Meier

Moderated by Lenora Worth

Reported by Michele Dunaway

[Susan Meier](#) has been at Harlequin for 30 years, but it took six years before she published her first book. She wanted to stay home with her son who had epilepsy, and then she wanted to be home all summer with her kids, and later all the time, well, because they were teens. “Necessity is the mother of invention,” she said. “You must think outside of the box.”

[Victoria Thompson](#) has had multiple changes in career from her first sale (historical romance) in 1984 to Kensington. She wrote 16 books for Kensington, three for Avon, and learned so much at Kensington that she stayed there. However, when western historicals began to fade, her income dropped by half, and then half again; she was dropped because the numbers were bad. She guessed that romantic suspense would be the next genre, but got glowing rejections. When her agent suggested she try a mystery series, she said she responded with the dumb words: “I don’t want to write the same character over and over.” Now she’s 22 books into the Gaslight Mystery series with book 23 releasing next year.

[Charlotte Hubbard](#) called her writing career a journey. She’s changed identities many times, but unlike the others, her start came when she sold her first story to True Love. “I sold 75 of these stories,” she said. She sold her first book to Zebra (an imprint of Kensington) and wrote six books for their Heartfire line. After cancellations of contracts, she went over to a new line, where she sold 11 books, of which five never saw the light of day. Then her agents disappeared and she started over. After almost giving up because “there are easier ways to drive yourself crazy,” Hubbard reinvented herself into Melissa MacNeal and then moved to Amish romance, which has been her niche since.

Following introductions, Meier summed up the bios as a Top Ten list:

1. Expect the unexpected.
2. Treat your coworkers (editors/agents) with tons of respect.
3. Be flexible. If your editor asks if they can make your hero a prince? Yes.
4. Find a niche.
5. Focus and discipline. Turn things in on time. Immerse yourself.
6. If asked for a favor, say yes and do it. Editors will remember.
7. Network. Conferences are where you meet editors.
8. Be a lifelong learner. Go on YouTube and listen/watch what others do.
9. Figure out what you need to earn. Don’t be afraid to renegotiate.
10. Be able to reinvent yourself.

Moderator Lenora Worth summed this up as consistency and staying power. It's not really a secret. She then asked the group "How important are agents?" Her own answer: Very.

Thompson said she's had three-and-a-half agents in her career, with the last agent for the last 25 years. Her agent found her the mystery gig. "She advises me. She thinks of things I don't," Thompson said. She reminded the audience that your agent/editor are not your friend or therapist. They are business partners.

Meier added, "You can't swing a dead cat at a writer's conference without hitting an agent I've fired." A few years ago, Meier negotiated a contract because "I'm better at it." She said agents have given her bad advice and made promises they didn't keep. She said they screwed things up. "You will be the only one who knows what you need," she said. Meier said she's had agents with huge shifts. "For the most part, you do need an agent," she said.

Q: How to work with editors?

Thompson said she never thought of asking for help with a plot problem, but you can do that. She's had three-way conference calls to discuss what's next. Editors can be a wonderful resource. Tap into what is there. It's a partnership. If not, it's a problem.

Q: Publishers—one or multiple?

Thompson: It's hard to write for two publishers. You must know yourself to keep track. Build relationships with everyone who works with your books. It takes a village. Your publicist is your best friend.

Hubbard: I box up cookies each Christmas and I send them to everyone at the publisher.

Meier: Be nice to your contract person. Be nice. Be kind. Be smart. Don't push your weight around. No "Do you know who I am?"

Thompson: Remember it's a business. Do not be sloppy or nasty.

Q: Marketing

Hubbard: So glad to have publicists. The business. The publisher does what you can't do yourself.

Thompson: My publisher does BookBub and Facebook ads. No one knows what works. We do know that 50 percent is effective but don't know which 50 percent.

Meier: I don't do a lot. Harlequin romance is not distributed in North America. I have a newsletter. I am very active on Facebook. Have tons of fun on Facebook. You can find avenues and areas. Don't need to spend a lot of money. Know your place and go with the flow. Find what you like.

Q: What would you do differently? Or that you did right?

Meier: This is a business. Think of your editor as a coworker. I email her. We work on what we will do next. Cultivate that relationship. I've survived seven editors. Be a valued member of the team.

Thompson: I made the wrong choice to switch agents. I needed to be with a bigger agent, but he was too big for me. The thing I did right was I learned I don't write in contemporary voice, and I waited and said yes to the mystery series. Be flexible.

Meier: You can see with my 70 books some tweaks in the books. You can see things like when I did not have as good of an editor. In your work you should see your growth pattern.

Hubbard: Do what you have the option for at the time. I'm finally in the sweet spot. What I did in the past is what it was.

Q: Newsletter sign up in back of book?

Hubbard: Back of book is different in print than in indie. Yes, I do snail and email letters, but I do postcards a lot. It's a time thing.

Q: Why not go indie?

Hubbard: I didn't want to do all that other stuff. I don't want to have to learn all about marketing etc.

Thompson: My backlist is digitized.

Meier: I like to play golf [Audience laughter—but she's serious.] I don't want to work 12 hours a day. I learned what makes a great writing life, and I'm done at 11 a.m., and I play golf. I am all those things I didn't have time for when I was raising a family and working in the evening.



Michele Dunaway is the author of 26 novels for traditional publishers.

Global Trends in Digital Publishing: Insider Insights from Kobo

Presented by Tara Cremin

Reported by Rochelle Paige

Tara Cremin, the author experience manager for [Kobo Writing Life](#) (KWL), shared a bit of Kobo's history before making some during her workshop. Kobo is always looking to innovate and grow, as proven by its track record dating back to 2009. Back in 2010, it reached readers in 130 countries with its first ereader device. Since then, Kobo has acquired more with acquisitions of readers from Sony Reader, Waterstones, and Flipkart, the acquisition of Overdrive, the launch of the Kobo Plus subscription service, the launch of audiobooks, and the alliance with Walmart for ebooks and audiobooks. It just recently launched the Kobo Libra HD device, which is waterproof. Kobo now has six million devices in 190 countries. And Cremin announced at NINC that direct upload of audiobooks is now available through Kobo Writing Life!

KWL is the self-publishing arm of Kobo. One in four ebooks sold on the site are self-published. KWL doesn't require exclusivity and encourages authors to utilize a wide distribution strategy. KWL offers global reach and only sells books. KWL was created by authors, for authors. It's even built books into its branding since Kobo is an anagram for book. With six employees, the team is small but has a big vision.

KWL provides a free, fast, and easy platform with a 70 percent payment rate for titles \$2.99 and above without an upper cap and 45 percent for below. As Cremin announced, they now offer direct audiobook upload. Royalties are structured differently from ebooks, with 45 percent for \$2.99 and above. They also offer a Kobo Audiobooks subscription. It's \$9.99 for listeners, who receive one audiobook credit per month. Subscription royalties are paid at 32 percent.

Audiobooks directly uploaded to KWL are available on Kobo and Walmart for the US. If authors don't have an ISBN for the audiobook, that's okay. KWL will provide one. If authors don't have a square cover, KWL will letterbox it for them based off the ebook cover. KWL will also create the table of contents, with authors dragging and dropping each individual chapter into KWL. Authors have full control over audiobook pricing and can set pricing in all currencies. The option to price free is even available. Ebook and Audio should be automatically linked. If not, just ask and KWL will fix it.

Cremin offered the following advice on how to market a Kobo audiobook:

- Create preorders.
 - Not assetless so a dummy file needs to be uploaded and then updated a week in advance of release to be safe.

- Include audiobooks in your release strategy, on the same day where possible.
 - Reach out to let KWL know the release day.
- Experiment with pricing.
- Target ads to Walmart.
- Promotions will be integrated with the tab but for now let them know if interested in audiobook promotions.

[KoboPlus](#) is the ebook subscription service currently offered in the Netherlands and Belgium, where it's partnered with Bol as eight million Dutch families have a Bol account. It's a large market with a huge appetite for English content. KWL utilizes a revenue share model after about 50 percent of the book is read. There's a 90-day commitment to enroll a title in the program, but there's no exclusivity requirement and authors can email if they needed to pull a title early. The program has added value to the ebook market and is a good opportunity to promote backlist titles to increase earnings from subscribers. Ads can be targeted to BOL users in the Netherlands. There should be new territories coming soon.

Authors have access to libraries through [Overdrive](#). It's a great time for indies to consider offering ebook titles to libraries because of Macmillan's recent pricing decision limiting library access to Macmillan titles. Authors can opt into Overdrive right in their KWL dashboard. Royalties are paid at 50 percent of the library price without an aggregator fee. Library sales are reported directly in the monthly sales report.

KWL continues to offer standard promotional opportunities via the Promotions tab on the dashboard. There are a wide variety of promotions, including for box sets and free first in series. Authors who don't have access to the Promotions tab should reach out to KWL to request it. They've also been working with some authors on [Kobo Originals](#), original translations with Kendall Ryan, Adam Croft, etc. Authors can also opt to offer their audiobook exclusively to Kobo listeners for a specific period.

One of the newest promotional opportunities KWL can provide its authors access to is Shorts by Viber, a mobile application used by more than nine hundred million people worldwide. KWL is launching chat-based stories that read as a text message thread. Messages are revealed when readers tap the screen, so readers control the pacing and rhythm of the stories. It's a new way to reach younger readers.

Other opportunities for NINC authors include:

- KWL podcast
 - let them know if interested in being interviewed or want to write for the blog
- Reach out before a BookBub or new release
 - KWL will look to see if there are promos coinciding with it timingwise
- Access to Literary Plus translation service with discounts for KWL authors
 - Click through their site to the landing page

Tara Cremin, author experience manager, is responsible for the overall author experience on Kobo Writing Life, from optimizing current features to looking for new avenues of growth.



Rochelle Paige is the NINC Conference Sponsorship Chair and writes romance in a variety of sub-genres: contemporary, new adult, paranormal, and romantic suspense.

Reading the Global Market

Presented by Kevin Tumlinson and Mark Lefebvre

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Mark Lefebvre's experience in publishing and bookselling spans more than three decades, and he's currently the director of business development for [Draft2Digital](#). Kevin Tumlinson is the director of marketing at Draft2Digital, bestselling and award-winning thriller author, and host of the [Wordslinger Podcast](#).

Think globally, price globally

Draft2Digital's (D2D) dashboard allows you to set a U.S. price and then customize territorial prices by region. They link inclusively and globally to foreign retailers. Publishers who claim that ebooks are over are selling dead trees. The death of the ebook has been greatly exaggerated. The ebook market is predicted to double in the next two years.

Universal book links at D2D's Books2Read.com

You can get a customized universal book link (UBL) from D2D's [Books2Read.com](#) UBL generator. Books2Read also gives you stats on how many people click on your UBL, and how many click through to Apple, Amazon, Kobo, and other stores. This service will include audiobooks soon, which has frequently been requested by authors. This will allow readers to find your book practically everywhere.

Audio at D2D

Audio is big at D2D. They're partnering with [Findaway Voices](#), taking an author-centric approach, with click and pass metadata. D2D will waive its \$49 set-up fee for narrator selection. They listen to your questions and are responsive.

D2D Print

D2D Print is still in beta, but it will be a fully functioning service. You can get matte and glossy covers, and you can convert your ebook cover automatically into a print version. If you're interested in using it, stay tuned on your dashboard for a chance to get into a beta users' program.

Referral perks at D2D

You can refer author friends to D2D's service and reap benefits if they join. D2D will issue you a customized URL for you to share with other authors. If someone uses your URL to sign up with D2D, you will receive 10 percent of D2D's cut of that author's revenue for two years (it used to be one year).

[Reporter note: Go to [Refer a Friend](#) at their website for more detailed information.]

Get into libraries via D2D

Both D2D and their audio partners, Findaway Voices, have 11 library channels, including the biggest ones: OverDrive, Baker & Taylor, Bibliotheca, and hoopla.

Macmillan's loss is your gain

Right now, Macmillan has an embargo against library sales; they won't let libraries stock ebooks. This represents a huge opportunity for the rest of us. You should be looking to librarians, schmoozing them, selling yourself, so that when they look for the latest bestselling Macmillan thriller in ebook and can't find it in their collection, and if your authors are Macmillan comps, you can fill that void, and they'll recommend yours. You can target ads on FB to librarians and send them ads based on your comps from Macmillan.

Q: Do the Books2Read UBL links include libraries?

A: No. Tell your readers to ask their own local librarian for your book.

Q: You can't find a link to buy your book at a library. You can tell readers to request your book at a library.

A: D2D has announced a partnership with hoopla, a library distribution service, which serves 40,000 libraries in 70+ countries, and more coming soon. hoopla is for audio and ebooks.

When you're exclusive at KU, you can't get into libraries. If you leave KU and go wide, you may piss off your KU readers whom you've accidentally trained to expect to get your books for free. Once you're distributed in libraries, you can appease these "freegans" by pointing out they can still get your books free through their library system.

In 2018, 23 percent of Findaway's audio sales came from libraries. In 2019 to date, the percentage is upwards of 40 percent to 45 percent.

The benefits of libraries

It's not just one copy, one borrow anymore. You get the magic of Cost Per Checkout. With this business plan there can be unlimited checkouts, so librarians can meet the demand. There's a lower buy-in for the librarians, too—they pay only 1/20 of full purchase price, rather than two to five times purchase price, as some traditional publishers charge them. There's a higher discoverability, and also greater revenue potential, with no loss of momentum. With revenue in your pocket per checkout, more copies out at once, and dynamic vs static revenue, you make more money, as well as gaining exposure to library borrowers.

Q: It's hard for authors to get into OverDrive, and librarians will only buy one copy. For those who did OverDrive through Kobo, what's the difference?

A: The difference is that Kobo had a one-to-one license. That deal took Mark nine months to negotiate.

Q: If we decide we want to opt in at D2D, how does that work?

A: OverDrive does everything manually.

You can opt into each library service individually, and you can see what the business model is per service before you sign up. Originally, Smashwords flooded libraries with a lot of junk books for .99 cents. When you contact a librarian and sell them on stocking your ebook and/or audio book from D2D, give them a link, otherwise it's hard for them to find it.

Library minutiae to remember

The reference librarian is a data nerd. If you make a request for something special, and if the acquisitions person is listed, reach out to them, but also reach out to the reference librarian. They don't throw away good information.

Look at your best retailer, look at which countries at that retailer are the places where your books are selling.

Preorders

Opportunities for preorders with Apple Books, Kobo, and OverDrive at D2D have a lot of options. Instead of a placeholder file, you can send preorders without giving an asset (assetless option). You can do preorders with long lead times. D2D will send sales sheets for preorders sometimes — it used to be that only big publishers did that.

Monthly webinars

Ask us anything. Our webinars are advertised on Facebook, and you can get notification about them via email in the D2D newsletter. For example, last time we talked about our most common support questions. Then we open up for free 30-minute author consultation calls with Kevin, Dan Wood, or Mark. We talk about how to market your books, or even how to market the NINC conference.

D2D promotions

We can do promotions at Apple, Kobo, OverDrive, and hoopla. You can promote preorders, use manual forms for submission collection, take advantage of our monthly/quarterly sales calls (D2D is your sales reps to retailers), and create online webforms to collect data for sell sheets such as libraries and bookstores get.

Email Mark.Lefebvre@draft2digital.com and ask him what the current promotions are at Apple, Kobo, OverDrive, and soon hoopla promos. D2D will help you send sell sheets.

Marketing and collaboration

D2D offers reading lists for promos, solo promos, custom themes, multi-author collaborations, and UBLs for all, even for KDP Select books.

Q&A

Q: What's a reading list?

A: Reading list means the usual compilation of covers with a fancy banner. Each book has its own UBL—with affiliate codes if you have one! You can even promote your books that are at print publishing houses.

You can target one of these promotion pages with a BookBub ad. The promotion can have a “vanity URL” (custom URL). We hope to curate promotions; we want to turn them into author-controlled promos.

Email if you want advice on marketing and collaboration: support@draft2digital.com.

Q: Do you share those group promos (reading lists) anywhere?

A: Maybe. If we find a really good reading list and want to do an experiment about what ads work where.

Q: The book pages are built by the author, not by D2D?

A: Yes, we offer a WYSIWYG U-build-it for the “reading lists.” You can upload your own banner, or use one of our templates. We let you build the reading list and hope to send it out to librarians and such.

Q: You can make the ebook cover into a print cover? What about audio cover? Can you make an ebook cover into an audio cover?

A: That's not automated right now. For audio, Findaway will just letter-box your ebook cover with black or some other color to make it a square.

Q: How do we build those reading list pages?

A: There's a [video](#) to walk you through it. Go to our YouTube pages. Books2Read.com will show you the links and the reading lists.

Q: Books2Read currently doesn't list out stores like amazon.uk or amazon.com (USA).

A: That's because Books2Read has localization; it will autodetect the reader's location and send them to the right place. Even if you're exclusive to Amazon, if the reader is from Germany, your UBL will send them to the German store.

Q: I love it that you give stats on totals for Books2Read's top three stores and total clicks. Will you expand those stats? Get more granular?

A: Oh yes. The best way you can help is to tell us what information you want as author, and how you're planning to use it. Email us at support@draft2digital so we can figure out what analytics to create.



Jennifer Stevenson is the author of five funny series: Liars in Love, Backstage Boys, Hinky Chicago, Slacker Demons, and Coed Demon Sluts.

Analysis of the Breakout Novel: From Midlist to Bestseller

Presented by Danielle Marshall and Victoria Stone

Reported by Michele Dunaway

After being orphaned again and again, with stuff falling through the cracks, Victoria Dahl moved over to Amazon for something completely different. She switched pen names for a fresh start in a new genre with a new publishing company, Lake Union.

Danielle Marshall, her editor, said that when it makes sense to switch genres, make sure you understand your brand. Make a big leap. Editors do look at your backlist and see who your readers are. A pen name gives you a clean slate. Marshall also said that a “debut is a wish, a promise, and a dream,” so a pen name makes a lot of sense. “You bump up against an invisible ceiling,” she said. The pen name helps break this.

Marshall went on to mention Kristen Hannah, who eased her readers from women’s fiction to upmarket, to her Nightingale series.

“Readers don’t read in the same genre. They want fresh authors,” Marshall said. “It might feel sad to break up with your own name.”

She suggests you write up a few names to see how you like them.

To break out a book, Marshall said that most readers don’t follow an author to a completely different genre. There may be some crossover, so put a tab on your website perhaps, but make sure your author brands are very clean. There may be times for you to keep your new author persona secret (such as writing erotica so you can go to church), but if readers know you as both, make sure readers know who is who.

She mentioned that Lake Union is inside Amazon, and to break out books, she can use an incredible incentive, the Amazon First Reads. Prime members get this free selection of books (or the books are discounted to \$1.99). It’s like a NetGalley or Goodreads giveaway.

Stone admitted it’s scary to say yes to give away a book free for a month.

However, Marshall said that once you’ve ignited your anonymous street team, then the train keeps rolling and the book sells. The next step is to have the next book squarely positioned for the same reader. You have to keep going after those readers. You want to establish yourself in the space you want to be read. Again, your follow-up book needs to be along the same lines. The third book you can have a little liberty. Marshall sees the building of any author brand as a five-book arc. While they do not offer “five book deals,” she sees an author’s career through a lens of building the brand over five books, assuming they each perform to forecast.

Amazon Publishing sometimes uses the strategy of the launching their first book with an author in Amazon First Reads, a powerful marketing program they nominate their books for. Because it is such a wide-reaching program, the author’s second book can have a bit of a

sophomore slump. But the third book is the best book for solidifying a brand in readers' minds, so they will use a different launch strategy to give it the best chance of becoming a bestseller.

"Every book can't be a breakout book," Stone said. "JK Rowling probably won't have another Harry Potter who gets a theme park." Stone went on to say, "Every book I've done for Amazon has been a different process. Don't feel like you should force the issue. Don't despair if you can't think about it."

Her advice may work for her and not for you. She says for her, she writes what she knows, but what she did was, she wrote historical first, and then moved into contemporary—her heroine was a successful writer with a filthy mind. So she went to a comfortable place. "Take it easy on yourself," Stone said.

In another book, she wrote about a stay-at-home mom about her age, a suburban mom. "I knew I didn't want to research. I could concentrate my efforts and energy on other parts," Stone said.

Marshall said launching a five-book arc allows authors to write breakout, but they keep flapping. Keep moving forward. It becomes a backlist and it can lift your entire list. She suggested to think of yourself as a brand—think about your reader. What other two books would they buy? They will buy whatever is in front of them. Write for your reader. Who do you admire? Who are you trying to be?

Stone said, "What are you bringing?" She also said that she sees domestic/emotional suspense (what she writes) as in, "Oh crap, what happened to my life?"

Marshall adds that domestic suspense books are where the protagonist says, "My husband did what?" or "My sister did what?" She mentions J.T. Ellison's books here.

Stone says she brings a sexier side to what she brings into domestic suspense, coming from the romance background.

Audience Q&A

Q: Being similar, what is the difference between psychological and domestic suspense?

Marshall: Domestic is defined as a woman's emotional journey through a big problem. It's more problem versus procedural.

Q: How do you get over that voice "not who you are" fear?

Stone: I had that. My editor kept asking what I had other than romance. I kept saying, "But why?" That's fine. I came up with ideas. I got through with my editor and agent being there to bounce ideas. Use people who will be honest with you. Took me quite a few starts. I was terrified I wouldn't think of another book. I write one book a year now instead of the three books a year with romance.

Marshall: Do stuff that scares you unless it's dangerous.

Q: What about newsletters?

Stone: I'm a fail on newsletters, but I did invite my readers to come over. They resubscribed.

Q: What about not changing genres but doing a higher concept book? You could use a pen name, but why?

Marshall: A debut is a precious new life. If you have readership problems, I would not use your original name.

Q: Lake Union, what does it want?

Marshall: A giant book that changes the world. [Laughter.] Book club fiction. Women's fiction that's sadder, or lighter rom com. Uplift, which is feel-good fiction (you cried but felt good). Historical fiction, except ancient or 60s or newer. Light suspense—women's journey. Victoria Stone is this.

Q: Are you saturated in psychological suspense?

Marshall: Yes. Also, WWII and domestic suspense and rom com. Might be different in three months. But if it's a great book, even if I have 700, I will publish.

Q: Do you need an agent?

Marshall: No, if you find your way to an editor, they'll be interested. Go through any mechanism you can. I've published from slush. I don't have a reader. I do it.

Q: What about Rhys Bowen?

Marshall: She had her NYT cozy Brit mysteries. She's a true midlist author and one of the hardest working women. She's best friends with Louise Penney. She wrote a 1, 2, 3 book arc with readers. She had a huge community. It was clean and still cozy. She had 80,000 BookBub followers. So we leveraged that brand.

Stone: Find a book idea you really believe in. Keep trying. Filter out what pieces of advice don't hit the spot. Don't be discouraged if you have to go another route.

Danielle Marshall is the editorial director of Lake Union Publishing. Victoria Helen Stone's bestselling thriller Jane Doe has been optioned by Sony Television; a follow-up novel, Problem Child, will be published by Lake Union in 2020.



Michele Dunaway is your Nink editor.

13 Reasons Why Authors Need an INC (or LLC) Now!

Presented by Michael Banner

Reported by Sidney Swanson

Michael Banner is an author who has also run a company that formed business entities, thus he understands both small business and author worlds. Starting his talk with a discussion of a politician whose Bigfoot erotica spurred the demise of a career, Banner posed the question: what can we learn from this man's mistakes?

Unfortunately for that writer's political aspirations, a pen name was not sufficient to keep his political life separate from his author life. When filing for copyright, authors are required to use a legal business name. In the case of the politician, filing for copyright would make it a simple task to link the two identities of erotica writer and politician.

Fortunately for writers, there is an easy and inexpensive way separate one's legal identity from one's writing: create a Limited Liability Corporation, or LLC, providing privacy and other benefits. Creating an LLC allows an author's assets to be legally separate from their business assets.

Banner identifies three types of reasons for creating an LLC:

1. Normal Reasons
2. Now Reasons
3. Other Reasons

Normal Reasons for creating an LLC

Reason #1: Tax benefits

Banner identifies tax savings as the primary reason to create an LLC. With the new pass-through entity deductions, a qualifying company will be able to reduce the amount of income that is taxed by 20 percent off the top. He notes that the ins and outs of this new regulation are extremely complicated and that your tax accountant will be best able to advise you in this area. When the IRS ruled on the new deduction, they devoted over 170 pages to explaining their ruling.

Beyond the potential savings of the pass-through entity deduction, an author can expect savings on regular self-employment taxes as well. Additionally, it is easier to separate your personal and author expenses if you have separate accounting for business expenses and personal expenses.

It is possible that you will be able to expense vacations. If, for example, you take a cruise and write a story about a cruise, the entity pays for it. If your spouse has a role in the business entity, you may be able to deduct their expenses on the cruise as well. Consult your accountant for details and advice.

Reason #2: Your publisher image

With a business entity, your publisher image is more professional. From your FB page to your website, everything you present looks more professional.

Reason #3: Partnerships

When you create an LLC, you create a new legal “being.” An entity gets an EIN, which is like a Social Security number for businesses. Publishing platforms and vendors prefer dealing with one “being.” Having an LLC provides better protection in contract situations. You can create partners of your spouse or kids, who are the heirs to the estate, allowing you to set up ahead of time who gets what if a partner dies.

Reason #4: Transferability

How would you sell your publishing assets? If you have an LLC, you can sell the entire entity, making transfer of assets clean and simple.

Reason #5: Liability protection (in general)

The separation of business from personal assets provides a shield of protection for an individual.

Reason #6: Professionalism

Other businesses will tend to look down on sole proprietors as being less professional, and as a self-publisher, you look more professional if you have an LLC.

Now Reasons: why you should do this today

Reason #7: Your corporate history

Banks, vendors, credit card companies, and other merchants prefer to offer credit to mature entities, not brand new ones, so establishing an LLC now will provide better opportunities in the future than if you put it off.

Reason #8: Future changes are harder to make

It is much easier to set things up correctly from the beginning rather than later on.

Reason #9: Instant credibility

You will get solicitations right from the get-go because your information is public. People know you mean business, and some will be eager to offer you a hand—or at least a service.

Reason #10: Unexpected liability

If for some reason, one of your character turns out to be real or if you accidentally use someone else’s brand, you could be liable. You can’t form an entity after the liability has happened, so do it now.

Reason #11: Unexpected death or disability

If you die, your spouse or partner can continue the entity without any change. You can't do this with a sole proprietorship. You can avoid probate by setting things up ahead of time. You can gift royalties to your heirs. However, it is important to make your heirs part of the entity rather than willing the entity to them.

Other Reasons

Reason #12: Co-author partnerships

Creating a business entity for co-authoring will allow you to establish ahead of time who is in charge of a multi-author box set and who isn't. You can set up the royalty agreement to have all royalties go to the entity and not to an individual.

Note that in the case of *multiple* multi-author box sets, you would set up a new entity for each box set.

Reason #13: Segment your liability

As above under "Normal" reasons, liability is a prime reason for an LLC, and if you need to further segment your liability, you can do so with an additional entity.

How to form your entity

When you are ready to form your entity, you can form it in the state in which you live, generally using forms that exist online. There are three steps to forming an LLC. First, you will need to check the name availability for your entity. Next, you will need to prepare (meaning "fill out") the form. Finally you will submit the form and pay.

For the **first step**, go to your state website (Banner has a list of these in his book *Entity Set Up*). Once you're there, search the state records for the name you wish to use. There is some variation state-to-state as to how these are listed on the state website, so search around. Listings should be alphabetic, making it easy for you to see if someone has already formed an entity with the name you want or if it is available.

For **step two**, in a different location on the website, find the form you need to fill out and submit (i.e., "New Florida LLC," "File or Correct LLC," etc.).

Finally, for the **third step**, you will submit and pay the fees. For most states, there will be some kind of annual fee in addition to the filing fee, but in most cases (California is a notable exception), the annual filing fees are low.

Responding to a handful of questions at the end, Banner provided this additional information:

- If you already have a DBA, you would move the assets of the business to the new LLC entity. With copyright registration, you transfer copyright from yourself to an entity.
- An LLC that is more than just you can be managed by someone else.
- Note that pen names, ISBNs, books, etc. are assets of the LLC and do not need to be listed anywhere in the LLC form.

- If you have a spouse or heirs, you don't have to list them on the LLC formation paperwork. You would list them instead in a private document.
- Lastly, if you do not wish to set up your LLC yourself, Banner's company can do this and offers a discount for NINC members.

Michael Banner is an international best-selling author, penning eleven novels as [ML Banner](#). A serial entrepreneur, Michael has formed dozens of businesses over thirty-five years, including [SmallBiZ.com](#), which has helped more than 100,000 to start their own corporation or LLC. Recently, he and another NINC member, co-founded [Mission Critical Publishing LLC](#).



*[Cidney Swanson](#) is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy. *Saving Mars* was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014.*

It's All About SEO: How to Make Your Books Findable on Search Engines

Presented by Ricardo Fayet (Reedsy)

Reported by Margaret Daley

Using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a method to drive more traffic to a website by increasing your visibility (for example, from 200 to 2000 views or more per day). One of the ways to drive more traffic to your website is to link to other sites and then have them link back to you. It can be through an article or blog post you put on your website. Having links to a website and links on those sites pointing back to yours validates your website to search engines.

Using SEO is like evergreen marketing where it is lasting and relevant long after its put up on the website (like blog posts that viewers come back to and draw more people over time). SEO is “free,” except for your time to drive traffic to you website. Also, SEO is logical, but you’ll need to understand the algorithms the different search engines uses, like Google or Amazon for example. SEO is also passive marketing where the customer comes to you.

For example, [Reedsy](#) looked for a topic which would help a post they wrote become high in the search results of the topic they wrote about. Their goal was a good SEO. Then they had others who had ties to the subject link to Reedsy’s post, and Reedsy linked back to their article (backlinks). Using this model, they did the same to different posts and saw their traffic to their site get more views, which only kept increasing.

But how does SEO help you to sell books? Fayet covered four areas that will assist you with that.

Understand algorithms

First, you need to understand the algorithms of a search engine (which all use SEO) like Google, YouTube, Amazon, and many others, and how a search engine works. Google has been around for a while and is the most used search engine. It also has the most advanced search algorithms. Google has four ranking factors they take into consideration when recommending a result:

1. Authority takes into consideration backlinks. Not just that you need backlinks, but what are you linking to and what is its quality. For example, if you link to an article by a renowned expert in a field, it is better and has more authority than if you link to a person who hasn’t built a reputation in that area yet. Google also looks at your domain name and how long you’ve had the domain. You might want both page backlinks but also domain backlinks.

2. Another consideration on Google is content quality. To up your content quality take a look at content length, readability, the variety of topics, and variety of not only images but also of audio and video, keyword density in the text, and freshness (keep adding and changing content). Blog posts should be long. Content over 2,000 words is more important.
3. The third consideration is on-page SEO. Google looks at titles and descriptions as well as interlinking, anchors, and implementing Schema.org. You can use [Schema.org](https://schema.org/) to markup your web pages.
4. The last ranking factor on Google is UX, which is page speed, security, mobile optimization, click through rate, bounce rate, and social media signals. Make sure you have https:// on your website instead of http:// for security reasons. Make sure your website makes it easy to read on a cell phone. The speed of a page loading is important because readers will move on if doesn't come up quickly. You can use Google Analytics to help you see what your click-through rate and bounce rate is.

More tips for Google:

1. Use buy links from places like BookBub, Goodreads, Reedsy as well as retailers.
2. Use [Google Keyword Planner](#) (for researching keywords for your website).
3. Use [Ahrefs](#).

Optimize

The second way SEO helps you sell books is by optimizing your books for searches at online retailers (see Amazon information below).

Google SEO

The third way is authors utilizing Google SEO specifically. Help your website be in the top results of searches for the categories your books fall into. Especially make sure your name comes up first in a search of your name. Make sure your name and title of your website doesn't compete with an established brand. Best to have your exact domain match on .com.

Content matters

Fourth, how can you use your knowledge of Google's SEO to help you drive traffic to your website and your books? How do you get a page to rank on Google? Write well written content for your website, optimize the meta title and description for clicks, build backlinks with contributors and guest posts, and build a network with contributors.

For the SEO, other sites like YouTube and Amazon are more naïve search engines compared to Google. On YouTube (an unknown search engine) views are important for SEO. The more videos you create will help your SEO because after seeing a video the next one comes up. Videos under five minutes are hard to rank. YouTube's main ranking factor is views. The focus is to keep people watching.

Amazon looks at a lot of ranking factors, but the main one is sales. It's easier to "game" because of the inaccurate fraud detection algorithms and human review is slow. Google has

human teams while Amazon doesn't, which makes it harder to strip their ranking from the ones who are gaming the system. Amazon search engine is where Google's was 10 years ago.

Amazon's ranking factors are location in the popularity list, number of sales coming from same or similar keyword searches, conversion rate for organic keyword searches, title match, and exact match in meta keywords. Amazon gives more weight from organic searches. It also uses percentages of your sales from previous days. The percent goes down with each day passing.

More tips for Amazon:

1. Use series title with keywords (make sure it isn't spammy).
2. Put keywords naturally in your blurb.
3. To discover well-converting keywords, use Amazon ads.
4. Look at your categories for your books and find hidden keywords you can use.

Basic rules for SEO are to understand the indexing factors of the search engine and ranking factors of the algorithm. If you want your book to show up in relevant searches, use the indexing factors, then use your ranking factors to get your book to the top of the relevant searches. Also, try to understand where the algorithm is.

Ricardo Fayet is one of the founders of [Reedsy](#), an online marketplace connecting authors with some of the world's best editors, designers, marketers and website designers. He's also the author of several online courses on marketing as part of [Reedsy Learning](#).



[Margaret Daley](#), a USA Today best-selling author of over 110 books, has been married for 49 years and is a firm believer in romance and love. When she isn't traveling or being with her two granddaughters, she's writing love stories with a suspense/mystery thread.

Star Turn

Presented by Damon Suede

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Damon Suede's bio says he's been a model, a messenger, a promoter, a programmer, a sculptor, a singer, a stripper, a bookkeeper, a bartender, a techie, a teacher, a director, so for his presentation Star Turn, he spoke from experience on how to make a character sparkle.

Abstraction: negatives undermine, positives underline

Curiosity is more powerful than imagination. Precision makes us focus and remember. Everything must matter in a book. Nothing is random. Focus on intention not backstory, so characters must take meaningful action at every stage. Instead of asking "Why?" ask "For what purpose?" (in order to...) Your protagonist should be pulled by the future, not pushed by the past. They should pursue rather than avoid.

Patterns

Brains evolved to identify patterns, ascertain significance, solve problems. We are hardwired to experience this firing and rewiring of our brains as pleasure. Audiences crave patterns with meaning, resonance, and resolution. There is a rhythm of tension and release that keeps us tuned in. The flow goes like this: attention > anticipation > emotion. Instead of mere detail, aim for significance. Don't just attract attention, reward it.

Art operates by establishing patterns

Art manipulates patterns to create and satisfy anticipation. Entertainment is our word for identifying a pattern and exploring it for pleasure. Delight recognizes a familiar pattern (sweet, but fleeting). Beauty reveals a new pattern exploiting tension between expectation and reality (powerful and persistent). Boredom is our word for exhausting the possible variations in a pattern.

Abstraction exercise: Trope burn

How will this protagonist meet and exceed audience expectations? At what style, pace, scale, heat level? Determine your protagonist's hook, genre, complexity, intimacy level, and character tropes.

Traction: no awe, no audience

Your protagonist is not a character but the character for your story. Protagonists pay attention. The protagonist is only approximately your Hero(ine) and your Antagonist is only approximately your Villain. Your protagonist is the character with the strongest needs, hardest

choices, worst conflicts, and biggest emotional journey. Isolation (either interior or exterior) of your protagonist highlights the emotional truth and personal struggle.

Drive

A character's drive is like the Greek word *deinos*, which means many things: "wondrous, terrible, weird, dangerous, powerful, clever, skilled, savage ... exceptional." This word was used by ancient Greeks to describe all great protagonists. (cf *deino-saurs*: wondrous/terrible lizards) Protagonists should be awesome and awful. They contain positives and negatives which cannot be separated. Secondary characters (who lack *deinos*) beg your protagonist to act normal ... unsuccessfully. (They reinforce the world.)

Actions speak louder than words

Characters are not people or things, but arcs of transformation revealed by high-stakes choices, through energy (the active forces which drive your story), tension (because suspension between two possibilities creates attention), and escalation (the amplification of stakes sustains audience interest).

Attention

Art is the act of directing attention with skill and intention. Action tries to change the status quo with meaningful consequences. Mere activity passes time in stasis, without any cost or impact to your character or the world. Avoidance can turn some activities into passive action, but it weakens character appeal. Adaptation only happens when a character runs out of excuses or escapes. Advancement moves a character closer to their goal by pushing them past conflicts.

Traction exercise: Casting Call

Pitch the starring role in your story to an A-list actor. Identify the razzle-dazzle hook, the cool moments, and the artistic opportunities. Appeal to the actor's self-interest. What's unique and also what's familiar about the role? What are the dangers or downsides for them in taking the role? Make two columns listing the positives and negatives for their taking the job.

Interaction: no effect, no relationship

Xenia (grace) is the Greek law of hospitality or "guest-friendship." *Xenia* means courtesy, generosity, and honor to strangers. Our most ancient, hardcoded interpersonal metric and core of instinctive empathy is embodied in *xenia*. *Xenia* establishes a character's value and values (both private and public). Audiences track *xenia* within and between characters, as a measure of those characters' just desserts. The true protagonist honors *xenia* without fail, and helps others do likewise. The antagonist violates *xenia*, often and awfully. Ergo, an antagonist's redemption requires careful planning. Secondary characters waver in *xenia*. This limits the audience's empathy for the secondary character. It's a cool trick to control the POV of the secondary character, withholding or revealing their reasons for violating *xenia*! Antiheroes walk the edge of *xenia*, like acrobats. They seem to breach *xenia* but actually don't.

The key to empathy is not likability but accessibility

Can we get inside the character? Too much character perfection paralyzes and prevents an audience's access. You must invite audiences to the party. (*Xenia* is the secret source of all audience empathy.) Empathy is easiest to achieve with pathos (the endangered child, the woman in jeopardy), but that makes pathos a cliché.

Protagonists pay attention to what matters (and earn our attention thereby)

Heroics are seen when characters do great deeds, show determination and tenacity that challenge the audience's self-imposed limitations. Baggage should be designed for the needs of the story. You pack what you need so you can get where you're going.

These fundamentals show that your characters can only exist in context (GMC)

A character needs a *Goal*, a focus that gives readers something specific to root for and charts a course toward the future. They need *Motivation* from flaws, wounds, and scars that allow readers to access the character's past, their history. These create *Conflict*, friction, and opponents through which they demonstrate their capacities and strengths in the present. A character's facets sidestep cliché by adding meaningful flavor: their facets present them with puzzles, phobias, and passions.

Relationships are built by the effect characters have on each other

If characters have no effect on each other, there's no relationship there. Characters reflect on one another, boosting one another's tactics. We expect this from allies, friends, and caregivers. Characters reject one another, blocking one another's tactics. We expect this from enemies, antagonists, and villains. Friction between actions turns external struggle into internal growth, and vice-versa.

Interaction exercise: Dream team

Who are the people that boost and block your protagonist and how will they do so? In two columns, list three reflection and three rejection characters, and then behaviors that will have a clear **effect** on the protagonist. Bonus: Which character is your protagonist's dark mirror?

Transaction: choice is risk

The character's desire path is the least-resistance route for them between Status Quo and Happiness. Readers crave **joy**!

Stakes are the gap between what the protagonist can win and what they can lose

Stakes create meaningful complexity. Always look for the polarity in a situation. Dramatic tension oscillates between possibilities. The external conflict must be internalized. The internal conflict must be externalized. Escalate the stakes! If your audience stops caring, they will stop reading. Danger galvanizes attention.

Every choice creates and destroys possibility

This is the push and pull between desire and doubt. That push-pull between desire and doubt stimulates determination. How much you want a thing or want its opposite shows the energy you've invested.

Transactions are inherently risky because they can succeed or fail based on offer and demand

What a character is willing to offer in order to achieve their goal, and what they demand, that is, what they expect in exchange for their offer, determines the stakes in a transaction.

Everyone uses cognitive filters to sort through information and stimuli quickly

Filters guide our actions and decisions based on our prior experience. Filters reflect the biases and beliefs that shape our reality. Knowing your personal filters allows you to write past them in your characters.

Emotional investment

Weigh the attention cost of every secondary character. Make them earn their space on the page. Often you can combine characters who are performing the same function in the story.

Transaction exercise: Whole goal

What makes your character care? What does happiness look like to them? What does this person **do** in the present tense, constantly and instinctively, to accomplish their goals everywhere they appear in the story? Fill in the variables in this sentence: Your [character] is [context] who pays attention in order to [action] to [achieve happiness]. Once you've written that core sentence, note their [**action**], then gather some synonymous **tactics** they can pursue.

Note: Downloads of Suede's presentation are available at damonsuede.com/ninc.

Damon Suede has been a full-time writer for print, stage, and screen for over two decades.



Jennifer Stevenson is the author of five funny series: Liars in Love, Backstage Boys, Hinky Chicago, Slacker Demons, and Coed Demon Sluts.

Diversity Your Storytelling: Emerging Platforms and Story Formats

Presented by Kilby Blades

Reported by Nicole Evelina

Kilby Blades, a multi-award-winning author and marketing expert who helps authors overcome their barriers, introduced four apps where storytelling is happening that is not book-based. All apps are all available for Apple and Android. Please keep in mind that they are constantly evolving, so by the time you read this, some things may have changed.

She did warn that on all of these platforms, getting your story to be visible is very difficult, as is making money. Many authors are using them to create bonus content for books/universes readers have already read/are familiar with, to lead readers to their book retail pages or [Patreon](#) accounts, or to another retail product, like a video game if the creator is also a gamer.

Tap by Wattpad

Origins: [This app](#) was created in 2017 with the goal of democratizing storytelling. In America, we're used to having a laptop, phone and maybe even a desktop computer, but in many parts of the world the only technology people have is their phone. Tap wanted to enable people everywhere to be storytellers using only their phones.

Story structure: The stories on Tap are chat-based, as if you're eavesdropping on someone else's chat, and have elements of choose-your-own-adventure stories. For example, you get to choose things like the hair color of a character. Some stories have other interactive features, like text that will animate based on emotion of scene (i.e., shaking for scary or nervous parts), but some features are limited to the authors who are doing well on the platform. If you want more than a text-based experience you can use Twine to help make it a more dynamic choose-your-own-adventure game using HTML.

Accepted story types: The app takes serials as well as one-shot stories. Fiction and non-fiction are accepted, but they really like socially important stories. You can use the platform for fan bonus stories.

Reader demographics: Global reach, some young, some older.

Reader experience: Tap is trying to groom the reader to make the experience feel like a game. For example, you get rewards for daily reading that help you get more of what you want through the app. You have to buy passes for premium content.

Author payment: Right now only Wattpad is making money off of Tap through in-app purchases. Author monetization models are under testing. Some are using Tap to lead people to Patreon to make money, with mixed success.

Submission process: There are no gatekeepers; you can publish instantly on their open library. They have resources to help new creators get used to the system.

Choice of Games

Origins: [This app](#) was founded 2009 to fill a gap in text-based games. The original idea was to write multiple choice games with a small number of variables.

Story structure: Users choose what happens to them within the story.

Accepted story types: It accepts self-contained games and ones that are successful are often asked to do sequels and turn into a series. It has a separate area for romance-based stories. The typical story is about 100,000 words—including the multiple choices and outcomes—which is really three 30,000-word stories.

Reader experience: Users choose from games based on genre or what's trending. Price varies; some are free and some you have to pay to unlock ad-free.

Author payment: They pay writers 10 percent to 25 percent royalties after \$7,500 to \$10,000 advances have earned out.

Submission process: Experienced writers in all genres are encouraged to apply, as well as game designers. They are especially looking for writers with published short stories, novels or an academic thesis and those with experience in writing tabletop RPGs or narrative games. Preference is given to marginalized writers such as women, LGBTQIA, disabled people, and people of color.

The submission process is detailed and long. If your application is accepted, you'll be asked to provide a writing sample. If they like that, you'll be asked to submit several game concepts. If they like any of them, they'll provide you an outline for a full pitch, which you will fill out. If they accept your outline, they'll offer you a contract. You retain the IP, which means you own the universe and characters, but they own the game itself. You will be payed in stages as the game is completed. It often takes about 18 months between when you send in your resume and when the game is finished. They have a training model and they will work with you on the game building part.

Radish

Origins: [Radish](#) was founded in 2015 to revolutionize the way stories are consumed and produced. The original idea was serialized fiction that you could read on your phone. Radish was also sometimes used for early release of exclusive content.

Story structure: Readers read by short chapters and use social components to interact with the story. It also has adopted chat-type fiction.

Accepted story types: Romance and other hot genre fiction, especially anything with tropes that will resonate with 20-somethings and younger millennials. The app wants short chapters (1,000-1,500 words) and those with cliffhangers do well, but it will take full novels. Ideally there is some sort of social component at the end of each chapter.

You are expected to release on regular intervals; weekly is ideal. At one time it banned erotica because of a law, but now it's becoming popular on Radish again. It will accept stories submitted elsewhere, but prefer exclusives.

Reader demographics: Big with romance readers and people in their 20s and younger.

Reader experience: Stories can be free, but readers can also buy coins in the Radish store that let them read more quickly and access premium content.

Author payment: Authors make money as a small royalty per chapter read. Be aware that the app has had issues with authors getting paid in the past.

Submission process: You have to apply to be part of it and the app has to accept you. However, it does proactively approach some authors.

Hooked

Origins: [Hooked](#) was founded in 2015 to provide a place for millennials to consume flash fiction, multimedia audio stories and engaging narrative videos on their phones.

Story structure: Some stories are chat-only, but newer ones have short video teasers as the first chapter and then chat-based for all the other chapters. Chat-based chapters may appear like texts or they may be played with sound. The sound and video were introduced to give a movie-like experience.

Accepted story types: The app is actively looking for YA fiction, especially if it has a romance component. Horror also does very well.

You are basically submitting scripts to them. The app is not big on text-based submissions; it wants dialogue like real life, but you have to be very concise. Write in the present tense, with snappy dialogue. (The app suggests reading *Save the Cat* to learn to write the way they want.) Whole story has to be told and finished in 1,000 words.

The app expects a polished script every week. There is some serialization in the app, but it is by invitation only.

Reader demographics: 60 percent female, 40 percent male, ages 13-30.

Reader experience: Hooked charges readers a subscription fee and they can make in-app purchases. Readers find the stories through Snapchat Discovery, where it is monetized by ads.

Author payment: Authors are paid a flat fee of \$1,000/1,000 words. Authors do not retain IP (character, story, universe) rights.

Submission process: The app (mostly) doesn't do open submissions, but it does take submissions from agents and publishers. However, it will take submissions from indie authors if you ask nicely about their back door submission option. It is very competitive.

Two others to look into

At the end of the session, audience members also suggested as [Episode](#) and [Chapters](#) as other options. Chapters is similar to Game of Choice, but is very graphically heavy. You can approach the app, but one audience member was actually approached by Chapters.

Is my story right for this?

Maybe. Different types lend themselves to different stories.

Gamifying platforms

- Characters have a lot of binary decisions.
- Story has no clear or singular way to progress (you have to have choices).
- Story has enough big decisions and significant plot points.
- Stories readers would want to read again to get a different outcome (e.g., choose your own adventure).

Chat platforms

- There are two characters and high stakes.
- Stories can be told in only what two people would text each other.
- Stories don't require much setup, where you can instantly understand the situation.

Prose Story Platforms

- Stories that don't feel like a book or don't satisfy the dopamine rush people look for while reading on devices.
- Stories that need more features than a Kindle can offer to add excitement.

Kilby Blades, award-winning author of many novels, holds an MBA from the University of Chicago and managed more than \$50 million in ad spend as Media VP with a NYC digital marketing agency.



Nicole Evelina is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

BookFunnel for the Advanced Indie Author

Presented by Damon Courtney

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

[BookFunnel](#), a media delivery service that delivers intellectual property everywhere outside of retailers, has continued to grow its platform and services within the last year. Creator and owner Damon Courtney shared both the newer options and the updates to existing services, all of which are designed to make authors more productive and visible, saving them time and opening up new doors to sales.

BookFunnel is platform agnostic, meaning that it delivers files to any device, not just to Kindles or Apple devices. After four years of being exclusively a provider of ebook files, the company has now moved into audio file delivery as well. Up to two hours of audio can be uploaded in a process very similar to uploading ebook files onto BookFunnel. Authors can choose their own sample bites of audio, too. Anything that can be done with an ebook can now also be performed with an audio file, including using them as reader magnets for newsletter signups, distributing to readers as advanced reader (or listener!) copies, selling on authors' own websites, used in group promotions, or awarding as prizes in giveaways. And Courtney promised that BookFunnel is not stopping with audio; it will eventually offer the delivery of other media, possibly even video at some point.

The level of author support at BookFunnel is high. The company also offers training videos and a comprehensive list of frequently asked questions, designed to make using this tool as simple as possible. Additionally, BookFunnel is able to save authors time by addressing issues readers might have with sideloading product to devices and by fielding some less than positive email responses from readers to authors. Communication between BookFunnel and authors is quick and accessible.

Certified email for advanced reader copy delivery is another service provided by BookFunnel. The author uploads the list of emails to which the ARCs should be sent, and BookFunnel delivers the files to those emails while also reminding the readers to finish reading and post reviews when the time is right. Campaigns can be duplicated for non-opens, and addresses can be added during the duplication process.

Another popular feature of BookFunnel is the Gift A Book offering. This allows authors to send copies of their books to whomever they chose with a unique, private download link. The ability to safely send an ebook is especially helpful at conferences and when networking, as well as when awarding prizes. Of course, authors can also do this with audio files now, too.

The promotions tab on BookFunnel is where authors can go to join with other writers for joint promotions. Organized by genre, authors can join an existing promotion or design a promotion campaign for either free books (to increase newsletter signups) or for discounted books (to increase sales and visibility). The sales promotions can be retailer-specific and work

well with those books in Kindle Unlimited. The organizer can randomize the order of the book covers on the landing page, moving a different set of books to the top periodically, while each author is responsible for his or her own landing page. Facebook pixels can be applied to both the group page and the individual landing page.

Authors can use the Bundles tab to create a group promotion with other authors they know (not organized via BookFunnel's promotions tab). These can also be used either to attract newsletter subscribers or to increase sales. The landing page links to the retailers of each author's book. The Facebook pixel can be used in this promotion as well, which enables authors to create new audiences for future ad campaigns, including retargeting readers who did not complete the initial sale.

Print codes are yet another newer feature offered on BookFunnel. Authors can generate up to one hundred unique download codes per book, which can then be given away or sold to readers. This option works well at in-person author/reader events to allow authors to actually sell their own ebooks. Each code is good for only one download, and once used cannot be redeemed again. The reader is also offered the option to join the author's newsletter at the time the book is downloaded. Courtney suggested using BookBrush to design book-specific postcards with a spot left open for the code. The author can print the codes on clear labels and affix one to each postcard to create an attractive product to sell or give away to readers. The book files have hidden watermarks within to discourage piracy.

BookFunnel also offers authors the option to create their own website stores, using both BookFunnel and one of a variety of sales vehicles. [PayHip](#) and [WooCommerce](#) both integrate easily with Wordpress sites, making it a simple process to build a store on an existing website. The clear advantage here is that there is no loss of income due to royalty cuts by retailers, with no limits on pricing or promotions, while website stores also offer the ability to capture a list of the people buying the books, to use for future promotions or ads. BookFunnel is the delivery vehicle in this process. An important note: books in Kindle Unlimited are not eligible to be sold on websites, as that violates the Terms of Service.

For authors who are selling on their site, preorders are now available. When setting up the book's sale page, the author simply chooses a delivery date in the future. The buyer will receive an email stating that the book will be delivered on release day and then BookFunnel sends a second email when the files are ready for download. These preorders can be assetless; BookFunnel will remind the author to upload the final files as the release day approaches. Before BookFunnel will deliver the book, the file must be uploaded and locked. There is no drop-dead time for upload, as the book is available as soon as the files are locked.

BookFunnel also offers integration with [Patreon](#) for authors wishing to set up a subscription service. BookFunnel will confirm that the reader is on the correct Patreon level or list before delivering the content requested. If the requester is not on that level, BookFunnel provides a way to join the list/level and encourages the reader to sign up.

Kindle Unlimited authors can use BookFunnel landing pages to funnel their readers to their books on KU through cross promotions with other authors. This does not violate the Kindle Unlimited Terms of Service.

Courtney remarked that BookFunnel is constantly seeking new ways to provide support and help to authors, to offer services and customer support wherever and however they can. He predicts even more new features will be releasing shortly on the BookFunnel site.

Damon Courtney is a fantasy author and creator of BookFunnel.com. Though he spends more time writing code than words these days, he still considers himself an author at heart and is always working to make the indie publishing community more awesome.



Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today best-selling romance author with over 80 books released. Her titles include new adult and adult contemporary romance; under the pen name Tamara Kendall, she writes paranormal romance, and under the pen name Tessa Kent, she writes erotic romance. And yes, she rocks purple hair.

Character Building

Presented by Damon Suede

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Damon Suede wants you to think of characters as action figures. He was cramming in what normally takes all day into a compressed hour workshop. Because of that, you can go to damonsuede.com/ninc to find his handouts online. (Look for the ones titled Moving Characters.)

In fiction, he said, “I’m the director.” Everything he does comes from his background in showbiz, which includes 29 years in entertainment.

His overview went like this:

- Organize: align, grammar, contrast, exercise (amp site)
- Catalyze: contrast, void, empathy, exercise (inner places)
- Characterize: action, tactics, trajectory, exercise (add verbs)
- Personalize: confrontation, relationships, characteristics (exercise: nitty gritty)

Organize

He said 95 percent of what you’ve been taught is underpants gnomes BS. Most writing advice relies on extrapolation.

The way you start is alignment. It keeps your effort efficient and effective, such as how you align yourself in a kitchen, or how you align books on a shelf. As he said, “If I gave you books, you’d stack them.”

We want coherence. He asked, “Do you really believe readers read all the words on a page?” He said we’re lucky if they see 60 percent, which is why alignment is there so if they miss something, the rest makes sense. He gave the example of a cowboy book he did where the character was always in a hurry. Thus, his cell phone company was Sprint. Everything matters in a book.

He next listed a long series of descriptors where each could have described Rosa Parks and Adolph Hitler (clearly, there’s a huge difference even though both were Christian, had short, dark hair, and raised by single mothers). He said many writers use description like an impersonal ad. You’re relying on your own prejudices.

We want meaningful detail. The ethos of the character matters—the character in the sense of morals and the ideas that define a group, community or belief. Characters can only exist in context.

Impersonal adds are a trap. Specifics are critical, but only in service to your story. Starting with trivia results in trivial stories, and these stories run out of steam because the character lacks ethos.

As for grammar, he said the English language moves from known to unknown, or lens/light. Fiction works dramatically because it works grammatically. For instance, Tolkien describes Gollum: Gollum lived on an island of slimy rock in the middle of a lake. Building a whole world, Suede said, works dramatically because it works grammatically.

Look at the basic rules: subject/predicate. Subject = lens. Predicate = light. Or simply Something/Happens.

Parts of speech are important because they group words by function. For instance, modifiers are pre-chewed interpretations of flat opinions: pretty, smart. Modifiers tell.

Nouns are generic assumptions that suggest: When you say pirate, do you mean Jack Sparrow? Or if you say Viking, do you mean Thor? Or the cartoon Vikings in *How to Train Your Dragon*?

Verbs show dynamics. They are a flow of energy. They are the real dynamics.

Many authors bog down in the “something” instead of what “happens.” People read for emotional experience. So give them an emotional experience, and that’s about actions.

At this point, Suede used the character of Snape as he illustrated his Amp site exercise. This is available at his website, but outlined below:

1. Write down 3-5 adjectives that describe your character.
2. Write down 3-5 adverbs (AKA how your character would do something).
3. Write down 3-5 nouns that identify your character.
4. Now expose the buried actions by transforming them into 10-15 verbs.

What’s gained and lost? Do they apply in every context? Why and why not? Stretch your voice.

Catalyze

Suede said that characters aren’t people, but they are devices to extract audience emotion. Like a milking machine, the goal is to get juice out of the audience, and characters are tools to do this. We are building a roller coaster (don’t write what you know—write what you feel), and actions speak louder than words. You cannot show energy, but you can see the effects of it. As he said, “I can look at if water is boiling.” Characters are action figures to make empathetic magic: you stick pins in a doll to make the reader feel things.

This is why people love fan fiction and whole fandoms built around worlds. Magic moves people. Stories are made of action like pigs are made of pork.

Thus, you must have contrast, or friction. A plus/minus. Suede said if he showed a picture of a 25-year-old muscular man running, this hot open immediately allows the reader to contextualize what is going on.

Contrast allows for a collision of world systems. We need to build opportunity for change. (More on his handout.) We have to get eyeballs on us.

The void is that we all have a dark seed inside of us. We are motivated by need, or lacking, or an injury, or an absence. *Harmartia* is not sin. The word means to miss a target. It’s this error, this inattention or screw up. It’s not a flaw, but something that’s messed with the archer’s aim.

The void frames the action via me/take/consume/personal. Void is like the thing that sucks in their life. Goals are the attempt to fill the void. The further in the past the void sits, the bigger it is. It creates momentum. It should be deeply resonate and have strong personal significance. There is no serious relief until the story's end.

Harry Potter's death of his parents. In Jane Austen's Emma, it's the death of her mom of an unexpected illness. The void sucks. It bends all actions. It screws with their minds. Harry Potter is always thinking of his parents.

Here Suede gave his Inner Pieces exercise:

- What core negative isolates your protagonist?
- What derails and damages your protagonist at every moment?
- What is the primal moment from which this void springs?
- Because I lack/miss/hate/fight (void), I always crave (remedy) from others.

Characterize

This is Suede's favorite part, that characters are forces, not faces. You are looking for energy on the page.

To do this, cast verbs. Surfaces are a trap: Snape is a teacher, hero, etc. Now use the verb: Snape vexes Harry.

The action I choose for the character is what I need for that story. There are 80 different versions of Cinderella. It's the action that changes them—the energy.

Look to the predicate and tap the (unchanging present tense) energy. Example: He finds to fill the void.

Characters are arcs of transformation revealed by high stakes choices. Casting characters with specific verbs forces them into action on every page because the best action comes from the character's void. How will they change without making choices or actions?

Pick verbs that push your creative limits. Recycling comfortable verbs and pairings will leave you regurgitating the same book.

Example: Katniss hunts. When you verbalize a character, they are always recognizable.

Freshen your actions. A transitive verb is a verb that acts upon something or interacts with something else: I wipe my face.

Action is transitive. Activity is intransitive. Subjects require objects to take action. You can't yawn something. Give action that does something else. Make characters do things that matter. Pick verbs that push your characters.

Transitive verbs equal the best actions; they provide character focus and impact. Intransitive verbs bog down characters because they allow for inertia. Make your characters do things that matter.

Next, in every scene you need a tactic. Here you will find synonyms for your verbs. Lizzie Bennett provokes. She mocks, judges, and goads. Aspects of the action reveal subtext and history. Blend internal and external tactics for dimension. Let some tactics fail ... but no Mary Sues/Sad Sacks). The best tactics reflect and express your character's grace. It's like poles on a battery. Energy can never exist in stasis.

Boredom, cliché, and apathy are your mortal enemies. Tactics must be specific, interactive, and personally significant.

Remember the GMC. Stories conjugate characters. The Count of Monte Cristo is avenging—and in every scene all he does comes under this.

These verbs matter because you can use them to create pitches. Verbs sell. Use character verbs to amplify the story's unique hook in its logline, blurb, and marketing materials. Punch into what's new to you and audience. Tell and sell with the same verbs.

The last part of this section is trajectory, where you'll want to use a thesaurus. Use your tactics to structure your story. Character is plot.

- Escalation: situate new tactics along a rising arc aimed at the goal.
- Digression: allow tactical maneuvers to surprise and deepen character.
- Climax: build to the most shocking or pivotal tactical verb (ladder).

Start with low tension and amplify that single action. Map the tactics so they guide the reader to your ending. ARC: start far from the emotional destination. Character tactics must affect everyone else's actions. They'll require adaption.

This section ends with the exercise to add verbs. Suede wants you to verbalize your main character(s) by using dynamic, transitive verbs to feel your way to the resonant option as if dowsing for their energy.

- Action: What core behavior defines your protagonist? What do they do in the present tense every time they appear in this (or any) story?
- Tactics: Check the synonyms+ of that action. What strategic re-actions make up the range of tactics they employ during the story? Show different facets of their essential action.

Personalize

Suede used the example of *Romancing the Stone* here to illustrate confrontation. When you give your characters actions/tactics, use antonyms. Joan seeks. Jack hides. This makes it impossible for them to co-exist, let alone cooperate. Do this with your characters. Keep them directed toward each other at close range. Character collisions expose cracks in the void and opportunities for grace. Emotions are feelings powerful enough to transform your life or destroy it.

(Suggestion—see handout here for more depth).

People care about actions. Your characters need to be in opposition.

| <u>Straight line</u> | <u>Wavy Line</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| (form) | (force) |
| intentional | impulsive |
| stick to rules | out conventions |
| pursue clear plan | gamble and improve |
| impose order | unleash chaos |
| anchor | sail |
| predator | prey |

It can vary depending on context. Verbs connect and entangle people. Use actions and tactics to create identities.

Vertical and horizontal identities look at each other. Vertical identities are inherited from family and community (ethnicity, language, class, DNA, etc.). Horizontal identities are acquired from peers (sexuality, talent, disability, traumas, etc.) These are often seen as flaws or betrayal.

Characters always require individual voices (rhythm, punctuation, idiom). Why this conversation? Dialogue is always an action/tactic. It's not a conversation.

Remember, because you are living in your own identity, dialogue brings your own prejudices.

As for expressions, every detail matters. Here Suede uses the example of Sarah Brown's uniform from *Guys and Dolls*, which is available on the handout.

He said to make your characteristics do the heavy lifting, as her uniform did. Once you know these characteristics, flesh out the foibles and facts about your characters. These express identity and how characters seem to others.

- Name: sound (euphonic) Culture (context/world building) *kleos*
- Paradox: What contradictions impedes progress and reveals the void?
- Occupation: employment, hobby, and significant pastime(s).
- Reputation: how public or private is the character's void and grace.
- Traits: impersonal advertising trivia (age, gender, class, heritage).

The final exercise was nitty gritty. He said that characteristics cohere. How will traits, circumstances, and behaviors (both internal and external) align with your character's action? Consider:

- How they fight/flirt/joke/love/hate/win/lose/play/pray/suffer/soar/relax.
- Their location/job/career/hobby/entertainment/income/assets/pets/allies/enemies.
- Their family/heritage/ethnicity/gender/class/education/sexuality/faith/kinks/politics.
- Their appearance/family/tastes/habits/health/body/style/home/travel/grooming.

Articulate 5-7 examples of telling details that manifest the character's action meaningfully.

Suede also gave two bonus exercises on his handouts.

1. In the exercise Reverberations, he told the audience:
 - Based upon what we know about your main character, identify oppositional action (reflection/ rejection) for the rest of the main cast.
 - Identify the transitive action that drives your main character.
 - Verify four secondary tactics by way of juicy, dynamic synonyms and ends and tangential options.
 - Identify *oppositional* actions for the rest of the main cast.
 - Consider an antonym for the love interest (or central relationship).
 - For other characters, try to oppose various tactics.
 - Seek fascinating collisions and friction via alignment.
2. The scrapbook exercise is on the handout.

Suede left the audience with thinking about their own action. How would you verbalize yourself? Name-brand authors shaped their presents for public consumption.

Again, handouts at damonsuede.com/ninc.

Damon Suede has been a full-time writer for print, stage, and screen for over two decades.



Michele Dunaway, your Nink editor, likes it when she learns things. This conference more than exceeded her expectations. She'll see you on the beach next year.

Creating Attractive Ads That Get Clicked

Presented by Josh Wiley, Corey Alderin, Kathleen Sweeney (Book Brush)

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Corey Alderin, lead developer and co-founder at [Book Brush](#), has been developing websites for 10 years. Along with Book Brush co-founder Josh Wiley and their manager of customer service and image creation specialist, Kathleen Sweeney, they shared tips on making ads great.

Their number one tip: test everything.

Tips for backgrounds

Use your cover. Use a villain. Be subtle with your background. You can enlarge or cut elements out of your cover for your background. Mostly you want them to see your book or your CTA. So go with a subtle background.

Tips for text

Make sure there is a high contrast between your background colors and your text colors.

Don't tell the whole story

Make only one or two main points. This makes your image easier to read, and makes reader want to look. Avoid clutter.

Choose an ad size and shape

You can search for background images right on the site. Book Brush has the rights to those images! Resize or alter the image you select. Add it to your book cover. You can select from templates in a wide variety of industry standard sizes, shapes, and formats. (Facebook ads, BookBub ads, Twitter-suitable images, etc.) Choose your book. Give the book cover time to populate your ad. Once your book cover appears, drag and drop it into position on the background. Now that you're set up, you can select a different format, or resize any of the images in situ, or add more images as preferred.

Manipulating your image

To create a CTA button, choose among Book Brush's samples. Place it, resize it, then add your text. Everything is double-clickable. You can change font, emphasis, and size, change line height, add a border, add or remove background colors, change text justification, and add a shadow. Add another button if you like. Move elements from foreground to background and back. There's a grid toggle to help you get your images sized.

You can delete using a trash button. Your image won't save until you are ready to save the template. Everything you save and download is now in your account.

Q&A

Q: Is there an undo button?

A: Coming. It's not there yet.

Q: Can you use filters to fade your cover out, for example?

A: Yes. You can also add transparency to the background. And maybe add a background color.

Q: Can you sample colors off the cover?

A: Not yet.

Q: You need to add the "eyedropper" tool.

Q: Is there a NINC code for getting Book Brush?

A: Yes. The code is **Ninc20**. Book Brush is \$79 with that coupon, which is 20 percent off the Paid Plus plan, which is \$96. That's 20 percent off for unlimited use per year of the tool. There's one additional add-on called Instant Mockups that costs \$20/year extra.

Q: Are backgrounds copyrighted?

A: You can get rights to the backgrounds when you download the final image, and most of them are free. Images come from popular image providers such as Pixabay.

Say you want to create a BookBub ad. You load your book for background. You resize it, then move it to focus on the bits you want in your background. Add in the main cover. The shift key resizes your cover proportionally. Now you're ready to add a stamp. One of the available stamps is for audio, in this case, a pair of .gif/PNG earbuds on their strings.

Q: Can you just write on the background, without an overlaying stamp?

A: Yes. We suggest using a text shadow. It really helps with making text stand out on a busy background.

Q: How big does your background have to be to fit into the ad?

A: One of the biggest sizes we use is Facebook size, which is 1200 pixels wide.

Q: Please show the background blur function?

A: (demonstrates) This tool blurs the background. There are several effects in Edit Background to add more personality to your image.

Q: Is there a way to upload elements?

A: Yes. Simply add the element to your MyStamps folder.

Q: You can also add backgrounds, too.

Q: Do you have any moving backgrounds?

A: Yes, that's up next.

Subtle background video effect

Alderin showed one video effect of flames, and another of smoke in multiple colors.

Open the ad you want to animate. Select the effect from the Video/Effect that you want. This layers the effect behind the image. Any transparency (.gif image) in your ad shows the video effect through the image from behind. If you don't want the effect in some parts, don't use a transparent image for those parts. Videos can be sized to fit the ad size you're working in.

There is no capability to move the video around on the ad space.

Q: Can you use the video effect for a newsletter?

A: You'd need a gif. Some tools will do that for you; ours don't.

Q: Will you be getting any new background templates soon?

A: Yes, we've hired someone with ads-for-authors experience.

Q: Can you easily resize this video?

A: Yes, if you use the image in custom creator. Load that in.

Q: You say we can't scale the video?

A: Yes. It goes to the basic size of the basic ad.

Q: Do you have to reconstruct your ad completely when moving from one ad size to another?

A: You can copy it, but if they're differently proportioned, there will be some image loss.

Engage your audience with branding for social media

Book Brush has some "instant mockup" social media templates to which you can add your book cover. There are about 200 of them, with, for example, a blank space inside a tablet shape, phone shape, or e-reader shape, proportioned for a book cover. Choose the size of instant mockup that matches the shape of your social media format. Insert your cover. Download it and save it. It saves into your own folder. Now you are ready to download it to your computer in a zip folder, extract it, and use it.

Instant mockups can't be changed in any way. But you can upload them into the custom creator to change them up. Anything you can do in custom creator you can do to these images once they are in custom creator. Use them as background. This add-on (instant mockups) is another \$20/year.

More Q&A

Q: When it says Buy Now at Amazon will that be a hot link to the book?

A: The entire image has a link embedded. Clicking anywhere on it will be live.

Q: You can save a copy to your account.

A: If you save and download it, it's not all the layers. If you save it as a template it preserves all the layers.

Q: Is there a limit to how many templates you can save?

A: Fifty templates.

Q: How many layers before it crashes?

A: I haven't reached that yet.

Q: What's the save function doing?

A: Every time you download it, it saves to your account.

Q: Your credits on the video creator ... how do they get used? If I download it to my computer but don't use it, does that count?

A: If you create it but don't download it, you don't burn a credit. Once you download it, you've spent a credit.

Q: Say you want to create a Facebook ad for A/B testing, can you copy the image and change one element?

A: Absolutely. That's why this tool was created.

Q: So if it's .99 cents today and you want to change the price tomorrow...

A: Yup. Copy the image, change the price, save both options, and download.

Q: Do you have a stamp that looks like a BookBub ad button?

A: There's a Buy Now button that looks pretty BookBubbish. You can create the same thing with a "make it a button" menu from the Stamps menu.

Q: If you get the regular product and pay an extra \$20 for mockups, you can use everything in the system unlimited amounts.

A: Except for the video, which you can use five per month. If you don't use them, they save over to the next month, up to 50 credits.

Q: Do you have any other cool tools?

A: Yes! Our tips button. Also, we have a Facebook group, and a lot of users share tips there. We also do webinars once a month for showing you things and where you can ask questions.

Q: Can you change the size of the button on the .99 cents Today template by making it smaller, or change it in other ways?

A: Yes.

Q: Are those webinars scheduled at a specific time particularly?

A: If you are on the webinars [notification list] you'll be notified, but no, we have no particular run schedule. You can get a recording later, too.

Q: Can we make headers and footers for Twitter and Facebook with Book Brush?

A: Yes.

Q: How about one for Facebook group headers?

A: I didn't realize, but you can also do a custom size header to fit.

Q: Can you upload your own fonts?

A: Yes. In your account, upload by drag and drop.



Jennifer Stevenson is the author of five funny series: Liars in Love, Backstage Boys, Hinky Chicago, Slacker Demons, and Coed Demon Sluts.

Does Your Business Plan Have A Happily Ever After?

Presented by Joe Solari

Reported by Nicole Evelina

(The slides from this presentation are available at Bit.ly/joeninc.)

All authors are business owners, regardless of whether we are traditional or self-published. Joe Solari, founder of indieauthoralchemy.com and an author-entrepreneur who coaches other authors, wants to help us run those businesses successfully. There is an easier way than you might think.

Three keys to success: Emotion, Relationships, and Diversification

He believes we all have a superpower: the ability to elicit emotion in another human being. We do that through telling stories. He illustrated this through the example of a group of men who sold \$128.74 of thrift store junk for \$3,612.51 just by making up the (fake) stories behind the otherwise useless items so that people who looked at them would feel a personal connection.

The key for us is to build a mutually beneficial relationship with our readers, much like honeybees and plants have to support our ecosystem. This is important for a few reasons:

1. **We're all out there trying to find similar readers and our signals become noise to them.** For example, the number of titles on Amazon will double in 4.4 years and the romance genre grows by 22 percent each year.
2. **There is a massive desire for content.** As people get more education, they have more leisure time and more money to spend, which means there are more people looking for content.

Because of this, you have to start thinking of yourself as a little Disney—a company that thinks of new ways to put out content. Copyright is the only monopoly left. Protecting your content gives you an infinite opportunity to create additional content off of it.

Solari believes there will soon come a time when Amazon, Facebook, Google, and Apple will start competing against each other for advertising dollars. If you understand the headwinds, you can make them work in your favor. You can use them to your benefit to find your readers and make sure they see your signal through the noise.

A new model for thinking about how you run your business

You actually play three main roles in your author business:

1. **Creator** – Your artistic side. It produces the most valuable assets, but it needs to be taken out of the role dealing with the business other than making the product.

2. **Investor** – Supplies capital for an expected return. Determines what the return on investment should be.
3. **CEO** – Plans the big picture, takes action, reviews the plan, and makes adjustments. Allocates the capital, conserves resources to meet the plan. Strikes a balance between creativity and business. Your CEO creates the value for your customers through cash flow and delivers the results **The Investor** expects. The CEO also stops **The Creator** from chasing butterflies.

Most businesses fail because they lack functionality and the number one reason is a lack of cash flow—they run out of cash. As authors, we need to stop being the person who is putting the money into the business. This is where our role as **The Investor** comes into play. Think about the money you are putting in and what you are getting out of it. A successful business delivers on investor goals. What is success to you? Even once you know that, this won't happen right away. It takes time and effort. The business must generate its own capital first.

Once the investor (you) gets the capital back and your cash flow is positive, you can start thinking about retirement planning, executing your life plans, and maybe even transitioning from a 9-to-5 job to writing fulltime. These are things you want **The CEO** to do.

Tools to Help

- **Business processes and systems**
 - **Author capital planner:** <https://www.indieauthoralchemy.com/author-capital-planner/>. This will help you create a five-year plan and capital needed for you to do what you need to do.
 - **Author cheat sheet:** This shows you how to set up your company based on income level.
- **Legal structures**
 - Solari offers a free book *Should I Incorporate?* through BookFunnel. Just text LLC to 884-947-6091 and you'll get a link. (Hint: if you can't pay \$150 to form an LLC, wait until you make \$10,000 in profit above expenses).
- **Expenses and tax code:** There are 80,000 pages of tax code. That means you can figure out how to use them to your advantage legally. Retirement is one of the biggest things you can do for tax deferral.

Writing the HEA (Happily Ever After) for your business

You have to take responsibility for the reader-writer relationship. Give them ways to buy direct from you, like your website. Raise money on Kickstarter. This will get you new customers. It will also help you understand the maximum threshold people are willing to pay you (i.e. your top tier pledge minus expenses).

Define success. What do you want your business to do for you? What is your goal? Ninety-five percent of businesses don't even have a simple plan like this.

Embrace change. With it comes massive opportunity.

Joe Solari is the founder of IndieAuthorAlchemy.com. He helps authors achieve their life goals while doing what they love. Joe does this by applying his 20 years of experience in entrepreneurship and his fancy MBA from the University of Chicago to the author business issues.



Nicole Evelina is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

Everything Writers Don't Need To Know About The Chicago Manual of Style

Presented by Carol Saller

Reported by Lisa Verge Higgins

English teachers don't always reveal the truth, and punctuation isn't always a right or wrong thing. Only by fudging a rule can writing begin to sing.

So says Carol Saller, author of [The Subversive Copyeditor Blog](#) and a contributing editor to *The Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS). In this session, Saller boiled down the 1,200-page CMOS, overwhelmingly preferred by U.S. publishers, by letting authors know what we can ignore and what we need to know before we break the rules.

For 20 years Saller has been the head of Q&A at CMOS, the manual whose neon-orange jacket has been described "as the color of a shrieking mango, able to be seen from outer space." The Q&A has become a cult destination for about 39,000 word nerds determined to master CMOS format, which started as a style sheet in 1906. In reading the queries sent in to her department over the years, Saller got a sense of what writers and editors know and what they don't, what excites them and what bothers them.

Most authors are familiar with *The Elements of Style* by Strunk & White, the bestselling style and grammar book in the U.S. Unfortunately, it's an aging style manual, the "book that ate America's brain." It propagates "zombie rules" like not starting a sentence with a conjunction or ending one with a preposition. Good copyeditors know that style and grammar rules evolve and change over time, so they make a point of knowing several style guides, keeping up to date on language trends, and understanding when flexibility is important, especially for creative writers.

Why learn about Chicago Style

By using Chicago Style, submissions will have a more professional look whether you're an indie-author or a traditionally published one. Understanding CMOS also helps in comprehending the marks and intent of copyeditors, who are just conforming to publishers' preferences and making an author's own choices consistent. Novelists can often create interesting effects when playing with the rules, so the more informed they are the more they'll be able to get away with.

The Chicago Manual of Style

Fortunately, there are multiple chapters in the CMOS that authors can pretty much completely ignore:

- Chapters 1-4 can be ditched because they cover the publishing process for journals.
- Chapters 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16 concern math, foreign languages, citations, and indexing, usually not necessary for novelists.
- Glossary and Bibliography can be passed over.

Most writers hang out in Part II, which covers style and usage:

- **Chapter 5: Grammar and Usage.** This is the biggest part of the CMOS and you'll never need most of it. The last 50 pages are a glossary of problematic words in alphabetical order. It's fun reading for word nerds.
- **Chapter 6: Punctuation.** This section is going to be your new best friend. Bad punctuation is distracting to editors. Fortunately, this super-friendly chapter is organized around each mark, so it's easy to find what you need.
- **Chapter 7: Spelling & Compounds.** This chapter covers tricky plurals and possessives, italics and quotation marks, and capitalizations. A spectacular feature is the hyphenation table, section 7.89.
- **Chapter 8: Names, Terms, Titles.** Do you capitalize Mr. or Mother or President or church or department? Saller says that "Many writers would rather eat a pound of hair than worry about these kinds of things." She reminds authors that these are just CMOS's preferences.
- **Chapter 9: Numbers.** This is a friendly chapter focused on numbers, dates, time of day, telephone numbers, etc. Consistency is not always a goal when it comes to writing numbers. What's important is smoothing the narrative for the reader. Avoid inconsistencies that would be distracting if they pop up close to one another. "Regional" consistency often will suffice.
- **Chapter 10: Abbreviations.** This is a really tiresome section, yet there is some important information on where to put punctuation on am or pm, USSR or U.S.S.R. etc.
- **Chapter 13: Quotations & Dialogue.** Where does punctuation go in quotes and dialogue? There is some overlap with the punctuation chapter.

Ten easy tricks to give your manuscript a professional look

By avoiding common grammar, punctuation, and Chicago Style pitfalls, you can put a quick polish on your manuscript and avoid raising the hackles of your copyeditor.

1. Avoid using two hyphens next to one another, instead use an em-dash.
2. Margins should be left-justified. Don't use full justification.
3. Avoid putting two spaces between sentences. This is the most persistent zombie rule.
4. Avoid excessive use of exclamation points or italics for emphasis.
5. Always remember to paginate.
6. Double space your manuscript. Single spacing makes editing difficult.
7. Don't design your pages by embedding images, etc., unless you're formatting them yourself.

8. Use page breaks to separate chapters, rather than use the return key to move the next chapter to the next page.
9. Turn off automatic hyphenation in your document.
10. Don't underline. That's for typewriters. If you need emphasis, use italics.

Six bonus tips to polish your work

1. Serial or "Oxford" commas are a hallmark of Chicago Style, so use them when necessary.
2. Whenever capitals are optional or you're not sure of the rule, use lowercase.
3. Hyphenate modifying phrases *before* a noun. A three-year-old child, the two-bedroom apartment. If the phrases come after, hyphenation isn't necessary: An apartment with two bedrooms; she is three years old. Gratuitous hyphens raise the hackles of copyeditors.
4. If you don't understand the difference between who and whom then don't use whom ever.
5. Indent your paragraphs.
6. Find and follow your publisher's recommendations. The most common requirements are double spacing, one inch margins, regular sized paper, etc.

The CMOS is called a bible as if it's perfect and must be followed religiously. But an experienced editor will recognize and not tamper with unusual figures of speech or idiomatic usage of an author's own style. Even the CMOS agrees (in section 2.51) that an author's own style should always be respected "whether flamboyant or pedestrian."

Carol Saller is a longtime contributing editor to The Chicago Manual of Style and author of The Subversive Copy Editor. Her posts on language and writing can be found at The Subversive Copy Editor blog as well as at CMOS Shop Talk and the Lingua Franca blog. As a creative writer, Carol has written books for all ages of children, mostly recently the YA novel Eddie's War.



Rita finalist [Lisa Verge Higgins](#) is an acclaimed author of uplifting women's fiction. Her rum-swilling alter ego Lisa Ann Verge writes historical adventure romance about hot men and dangerous women.

Narrate and Record Your Own Audiobook

Presented by Matt Buchman

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Authors as audiobook narrators

Romantic suspense author Matt (M.L.) Buchman began recording his own audiobooks for two reasons: the high expense of hiring it out and his frustration with narrators' style choices. Buchman recognizes that many authors worry they don't have the right voice for the job, but he believes there is no narrator better than the author. He points out that Stephen King reads with hardly any tonal variation, but his listeners enjoy him and find it hard to step away from his narration. In Buchman's view, if King can record his own audiobooks, any author can.

An author can either record the narration and do the sound engineering, or choose to narrate only and then pay someone else to produce the audiobook.

For those authors ready to dip their toes in recording, Buchman recommends studying voice with the same diligence you once used in studying novels. Study the techniques that are used to reproduce the voices of various characters. He also suggested attending storytelling groups to discover just how riveting the human voice can be in telling stories. Television and movies, however, will not provide good models for narration, so be sure to focus your study on the craft of narration itself.

But my voice sounds weird...

Buchman explained that 50 percent of what we hear of our own voice travels along the jawbone, so the first time you hear your voice from a recording instead of from inside your head, it will sound weird. He has a simple solution to this problem: get over it. Joking aside, he insists that with exposure your own voice will no longer "sound weird" to you.

What about tone and accents?

Keep your tone pleasant. For men providing the voices of their female characters, avoid squeaky voices (which tend to be formed by keeping the sound too nasal). Using a gravelly voice for male characters is a similarly uninteresting choice. Provide some differentiation between male and female voices, but it doesn't have to be dramatically different.

When approaching characters with accents, Buchman recommends not attempting the accent, but rather having the written descriptions of the accent in your novel do all the heavy lifting.

In audiobook narration, under-dramatic tops over-dramatic every time. Let the reader extend the character's voice using their own imagination.

As authors, we use punctuation carefully and with intention. Everything a listener needs is (or should be) already contained in the writing, and your job as a narrator is to follow the punctuation as it is written.

Advanced voice skills

Position of the head makes a huge difference in sound, and Buchman recommends “playing with voices” in a sound booth to get used to what is possible. Spend time figuring out what each character sounds like.

Once you figure out all the different voices, create a “Voice Bible.” Record a description of each voice, *in* each voice. When recording these, Buchman says aloud something like: “He’s easy-going and casual, from Long Island with a bit of fake Texas thrown in.”

Once you have recorded the description of all the different characters, you have a point of reference. At the beginning of each recording session, listen to the Voice Bible to get the voices clear in your head. When you are still new to narration, it might be necessary to take frequent breaks from narrating in order to listen to the Voice Bible.

Considerations during recording

While recording, think about proper characterization, pacing, immaculate enunciation, and correct pronunciation. Check the pronunciation of any words that are challenging. A narrator’s energy needs to be high, so keep recording sessions short enough that the sessions are fun to do rather than exhausting.

The sound booth

The recording booth needs to be padded and buffered against things such as traffic noise and household noise. A booth requires isolation, sound absorption, and air. Hang blankets to deaden the sound. A rolling coat rack with a piano stool can be covered with blankets to make a good sound space. A quick search on the internet for “home audio recording booth” will yield plenty of good ideas.

You can rent studio space, but keep in mind that an audiobook has different requirements from musical recordings. Bring your own equipment if you rent studio space, including a laptop which will allow you to “turn the page” without sound. A laptop also provides the ability to make changes on-the-go. Beyond the laptop, you will also need software and a microphone.

Buchman recommends buying a shock mount (about \$15) and the Scarlett2i2 Studio (about \$350). A powered mic is necessary and will provide more gain, capture of softer sounds, and better signal to noise. There’s a learning curve to using a mic. Record with headphones because the mic will hear everything. Experiment with distance from the mic and volume of the voice.

Pro-tip: If you have an echo, this can be fixed by right clicking the system tray Speaker icon, then select the “volume mixer,” then mute the second microphone feed.

You will need to record title, series name and the number in the series as well as written by and narrated by. The foreword, dedication, and chapter numbers must be read aloud. For the back matter, include the title, series name and number, credit for the writing and narration, and the performance copyright date, along with the statement “all rights reserved.” Add a marketing statement such as, “For more information about this title, please visit this website address.” Be sure to thank your reader with a simple, “Thank you for listening.”

Sound engineering

Engineering is where sound editing happens, and it is essential. This is where you take out everything that doesn't belong. If you are doing your own engineering, purchase Adobe Audition. Garageband (Mac) and Audacity (Windows) will provide sufficient quality for the initial recording but not post-production.

When recording, keep an eye on the spikes in volume so that you can fix a mistake, saving work later. Mistakes can be fixed by beginning a fix after a sentence ends. Using "Punch and Roll," you will receive five seconds of reading to allow you to segue into the next sentence.

After the recording is done, first fix the major spikes, run the effects racks, match the loudness, scan statistics, set the metadata, listen, input fixes, and save in the proper format. A beginner can expect to spend two-to-five hours for each finished hour of recording. You can automate the removal of clicks and other problems by setting it up in the effects rack. A deEsser will remove excess sibilance. A deHummer removes any low hum. The dynamics processing allows you to de-emphasize breath-intake and emphasize voiced narration. A graphic EQ and compressor allow further averaging of stronger and weaker sounds.

Before publishing, listen to find any missing or garbled words, clicks, groans, car noise, other stray sounds, bad pronunciation, use of the wrong voice, overloud breaths, and inconsistent pacing. Do not remove all the breath, however, or the pacing will sound very odd.

When naming files, be consistent. Choose different naming conventions for raw versus processed sound. Buchman recommends simultaneous release of ebook and audio, requiring planning because ACX can take three weeks to make the audio live.

For narrators who want to outsource engineering, search "Upwork" for engineers who will do the work.

Finally

M.L. Buchman has two books available on the topic of narration and sound engineering: *Character Voice* and *Narrate and Record Your Own Audiobook*. Both are available in print and audio.

M.L. "Matt" Buchman has over 60 novels, 100 short stories, and a fast-growing pile of audiobooks out in the world. Recently named as one of "The 20 Best Romantic Suspense Novels: Modern Masterpieces" by ALA's Booklist, he has also been selected three times as "Top-10 Romance Novel of the Year." NPR and B&N listed other works as "Best 5 Romances of the Year."



Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy. *Saving Mars* was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014.

Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

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

Networking

The email list for Novelists, Inc. Members: <https://groups.io/g/NINCLINK>

Join our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>

We offer a critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>

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Conference 2019: Planning For Success

Conference information: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

Conference Registration: <https://ninc.com/conferences/registration/2019-member-registration/>

Conference e-loop: <https://groups.io/g/BeachNINC2019>

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Welcome Packet: http://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf

Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> along with other member discounts.

Volunteer

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- 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.

Founders

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

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- [*Complete committee member listings*](#) are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.
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Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin

P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353

admin@ninc.com

Address changes may be made on the website.

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