



# Nink May 2017

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# President's Voice

By Erica Ridley



Happy May! We've added some great new member benefits to our [Freebies and Discounts](#) list, shown in full in the next article. They include distribution tools such as BookFunnel, author software Scrivener, and editorial services from Peter Senftleben.

We've got more in the works, including a special offer from *Publishers Weekly*, coming soon.

## NINC Member Benefits

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

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

## 2017 NINC Conference: Discovery

Registration for the 2017 NINC Conference: Discovery is now open. To register, please [log in](#) and visit: <https://ninc.com/conferences/ninc-conference-2017/>

The important Conference FAQ can be found here: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/ninc-conference-faq/>

And hotel information is here: <https://ninc.com/conferences/ninc-conference-2017/conference-hotel/>

## 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/>

Your username is your email address, and your password was sent to you in an email with subject line "NINC: New website for renewals & more!"

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

we will reset your password for you. Thank you!

*Erica*

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

# 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

Join our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>

We offer a critique/brainstorming group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NINKcritique>

## Conference

Registration: <https://ninc.com/conferences/ninc-conference-2017/registration/>

Conference loop: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/BeachNINC2017/info>

## Newsletter

Propose an article: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/propose-an-article/>

Submit a letter to the editor: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/submit-letter-to-editor/>

Newsletter archives: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/news-archive/>

*Best of Nink* in paperback: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/best-of-nink/>

## Website services

Legal Fund: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/legal-fund/>

Pro Services Directory: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/pro-services-directory/>

Sample Letters: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/sample-letters/>

Articles & Links: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/articles-and-links/>

Welcome Packet: [https://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/2017/01/2017\\_New\\_Member\\_Welcome\\_Packet.pdf](https://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet.pdf)

## Member discounts

Find them on our website: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/>

**Author, Author:** NINC members may purchase their own books at deep discounts. Discount range between 34-55% depending on source and quantity. We have accounts with all the major publishers and many mid-sized ones as well as Ingram, Baker & Taylor, Perseus and

more. We also report to the NYTimes for list consideration. We can ship to you, to a conference location, to a contest—wherever you need them. Domestic US only.

**Author Buzz:** Get exposure to over 875,000 readers, 12,000 librarians and 10,000 booksellers, plus 10,000 bloggers and other industry professionals as well as readers and leaders of more than 47,000 book clubs. We are also the only way for authors to buy premium ads at Goodreads, Amazon and [BN.com](http://BN.com). NINC members get a \$50 discount.

**BookFunnel:** BookFunnel has generously offered a coupon for new subscribers that will take \$50 off their Mid-List or Bestseller yearly plans. If you are already a basic subscriber who would like to upgrade, you may be able to work out a discount, but you will have to contact BookFunnel individually and explain your situation.

**The Hot Sheet:** Porter Anderson and Jane Friedman, editors of The Hot Sheet, an industry newsletter delivered every other Wednesday, are offering NINC members a discount of 20% on subscriptions. Add NINC2017 at checkout to receive the discount.

**House of Design:** Shaila Abdullah has over a decade of experience designing websites for authors. Being an award-winning author herself, she understands the industry, and will provide you with a content management website that reflects your unique style, genre, and personality. NINC members get 10% off.

**Literature and Latte (Scrivener):** Literature and Latte is offering NINC members a 20% discount on their popular Scrivener writing software. This is for Mac version 2.x or Scrivener for Windows version 1.x. A free trial is also available at <http://www.literatureandlatte.com/trial.php>

Peter Senftleben, **Editor:** 10% discount for NINC members. Services include manuscript evaluation, structural edit, extensive edit. All new clients receive a complimentary ten-page trial edit.

## 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:

- Membership Committee
- Assistant Newsletter Editor
- Newsletter Production Assistant (paid)
- Facebook group moderator
- NINCLink moderator
- Social Media coordinator
- Conference Promoter

# NINC 2017 Discovery

Find out what's coming to the beach in October

*By Laura Hayden*

We're knee-deep in the 2017 conference plans and registration is hopping, having already reached triple digits while the conference is still more than 150 days away.

Last year, we heard a lot about discoverability. This year, we're going to take a much closer look. As it turns out, it's not enough to grab readers by writing fantastic books—you also have to get the attention of booksellers, distributors, retailer marketing departments, in-house publishing marketers, editors, reviewers, and media professionals.

So your goal becomes to create buzz and amplify it while uncovering additional opportunities and alternative revenue streams. This year, our goal is to help you to reach your full potential with each book, to help you improve your return on investment, and to increase the size and enthusiasm of your fan base.

## **Main conference**

Our main conference workshops will be scheduled with up to three tracks per session so that there always will be a topic of interest for everyone attending. Workshops are open to NINC members, registered industry guests and author assistants.

We're designing all workshop and panel topics to fit our member demographic—experienced, career-oriented authors who seek to either maintain their success to take their careers to the next level.

## **Author assistants**

This year, we're continuing our very successful author assistant programing. Registration for assistants opens this month. Assistants will get access to:

- The long-format (2 hours) business and marketing panels at First Word
- Main conference workshops
- Night Owl nightclubs
- Wednesday night welcome reception
- Thursday First Word lunch buffet
- Friday lunch buffet
- Saturday Blow-Out buffet dinner

## **First Word**

We're planning a full day of intensive, high-level explorations of the issues, problems and challenges that writers face once they have written and sold multiple books, sometimes in many

genres.

Topics to be addressed include Craft, Creativity, Business, and Marketing. First Word is open to all registered NINC members, their spouses/companions, all registered industry guests, author assistants, and non-member First Word Day registrants.

## **Night Owls**

We cap off each day of workshops with Night Owl sessions—informally structured round-table discussions for members only.

## **Things to remember**

The conference is Oct. 4-8 at TradeWinds Island Grand Resort (their [website](#)).

After registering for the conference, call the TradeWinds to reserve your room. Tell them you are with NINC (Novelists, Inc.). Rates run from \$165 to \$245 depending on location and room/suite style. Room rates are good October 1-10. Rooms go fast, so register and reserve soon!

Flights: Two airports are about 30 minutes away from the hotel. Tampa (TPA) has 18 air carriers including American, Delta, United, Frontier, Southwest and many more. St. Pete-Clearwater (PIE) is smaller, with limited small-carrier service.

Companion Meals: Bringing a spouse, children or other guests? You can order individual companion meals, picking and choosing the meal/day. [Learn more](#).

To recap, we're still busy putting together the programming and selecting the speakers so watch the newsletter and the [NINCLink email loop](#) for more information. For conference registrants, be sure to join the [BeachNINC2017 loop](#).

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Your NINC Conference Committee:

*Programming Chair: Julie Ortolon*

*Sponsorship Chair: Rochelle Paige*

*Logistics Chair: Karen Fox*

*Registration Chair: Pam McCutcheon*

*Communications Chair: Laura Hayden*

# Doctor Storystorm

## How I learned to stop worrying and love new ideas

*By Diana Peterfreund*



By the end of 2016, I was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. I'd spent a year guiding the NINC ship of state as president, finished up a grueling trilogy contract with Harper, and dealt with two young kids and the tumultuous roller coaster of infant childcare. World news was mostly depressing, no one in my hometown of DC knew what 2017 would bring, and my family (even the dog) was hit by a series of severe flus, surgeries, and infections that stretched across the entire last quarter of the year.

My agent asked me what I wanted to work on next, and the honest answer was: I had no idea.

I'd played around with a few picture book ideas that summer, but I knew little about the market. On a playdate with a local writer and her toddler, I learned about a Facebook group called PiBoIdMo (short for "Picture Book Idea Month"), the brainchild of children's writer Tara Lazar. She created the program in 2009 as "the picture book author's answer to NaNoWriMo" and the accompanying Facebook group was home to many picture book authors who might help me learn more about this segment of the industry.

Turns out, I joined just at the right time, as Lazar was in the process of turning PiBoIdMo into a new, more inclusive program called Storystorm, which would launch in January of 2017.

Storystorm, a portmanteau of "story" and "brainstorm," was a month-long challenge to come up with at least thirty story ideas—any kind. Storystorm wasn't just for picture book writers, either. It welcomed all writers, with ideas from picture books to novels to everything in between. As with NaNoWriMo, participants could join for free, cheer each other on, read educational essays from established authors, and complete challenges to be eligible for donated prizes such as critiques or conference calls.

As I'd been a full-time writer for over a decade, the prizes weren't what interested me, but the philosophy behind the program was fascinating.

Thirty story ideas.

Anything I wanted.

Funny, punny titles, curious characters, or intriguing premises were enough to count —“ideas” didn’t have to be fully-fleshed outlines or treatments. I was simply supposed to jot things down as they came to me and look back over my list at the end of the month to see if anything has legs.

I found it intoxicating.

For years I’d told new and wannabe writers (especially the kind who approach published novelists with “a great book idea they’d like to hire someone to write”) that story ideas aren’t precious commodities; they spring up everywhere, like wildflowers. The real trick is taking that idea and culturing it into a real project, with complex characters, complete plots, and compelling prose.

Oh, and words. Thousands and thousands of hard-won words.

But somewhere along the way I’d forgotten to practice what I preached, and discarded story ideas as overdone or silly, only to curse when I saw someone else’s book deal trumpeting that exact same premise I’d thought was too worthless to pursue. What could it hurt to spend a month thinking solely of ideas?

On December 31, I signed up.

On January 1, I woke up with a killer idea for a YA novel.

I scrawled down the idea on the page of my journal I’d set aside for Storystorming, then spent a few more minutes lying in bed and thinking about this story, the characters, and the structure. What a great start to the year!

The next day, my daughter begged for an “original” bedtime story and I improvised an “Ugly Duckling”-type tale matching her exacting specifications (#2 on my Storystorm list reads “The Fairy with No Wings—possible picture book?”).

By the end of the week, I’d amassed two new novel ideas, a couple of picture books, and some short stories.

And that’s when things started getting interesting. A friend had tipped me off to a few work-for-hire outfits interested in inviting children’s authors to write short stories for specialized markets (think education, games, etc.). All of a sudden, I had a reason to come up with short story ideas.

Indeed, eighteen (or three-fifths) of the thirty ideas I came up with over the Storystorm period were short stories aimed at these markets. Of these eighteen, I ended up pitching twelve of them, and I’m happy to report that I have in the last two months made five sales from Storystorm ideas, and there are another four I’m waiting to hear back about.

What about the rest? I’m halfway through a proposal for one of the three novels I came up with during Storystorm, and a few other children’s books are percolating in the back of my mind. As I look over the list, I can definitely see a few duds—I have no clue what I was thinking when I scrawled down “Jane Austen and mushrooms,” for example—but more than half of my ideas ended up being worth further exploration.

Here’s the official breakdown:

Diana’s Storystorm Ideas 2017

- Novels: 3
- Chapter Books: 3

- Picture Books: 4
- Adult Novellas: 2
- Children's Short Stories: 18

Promising: 19/30

Pitched: 12/30

Sold (so far!): 5/30

Full disclaimer: results may vary. Novelists I've told about Storystorm wonder if it's as useful for those writing longer works, for whom ideas might need a bit more meat to stick. Others wonder if my success is an outlier because the timing matched so well with my work-for-hire opportunity, or because I write in multiple markets, short and long. After all, even the quickest novelist is not going to be able to report back two months after Storystorm with five accepted manuscripts.

But being hidebound by imaginary rules in a free online challenge is sort of missing the point. Maybe "ideas" for you can mean five ways of killing your villain, ten meet-cutes, or seven unusual things your hero might do in bed.

And whether or not the program resulted in saleable projects is only part of the story. The bigger change is the one it made in my brain. As the creator Tara Lazar intended, the real goal in Storystorm is to break free of the precious mindset around ideas. As she wrote on the official website, "The object is to heighten your idea-generating senses. Ideas may build upon other ideas and your list of potential stories will grow stronger as the days pass."

Indeed, that's exactly what happened for me.

By the end of the month, I saw ideas everywhere. When my editor came back with a request to change the ending of my novel, I shot back a list of four possible alternatives for the heroes to vanquish the bad guys. When a work-for-hire contact requested a last-minute commission for a holiday project, I was able to generate six ideas during my afternoon carpool.

I've since come up with many more ideas, including a book-length project that has completely captured my imagination, and all the hundreds of mini-ideas within the concept that make it sing.

Storystorm kept me in the game during a time I felt creatively wrung out. It reminded me that I am a storyteller, and that ideas are all around me, waiting to be captured and put to use in my work. It was a really energizing way to start the year, and opened the door to new opportunities.

Next January, I highly recommend joining Tara Lazar and more than 1,500 other writers to jumpstart your creative year. I'll be there. Or, if you don't want to wait, I'll be running a mini-brainstorming event just for NINC members—Beachside Brainstorm—on the NINC Facebook Group for thirty days this June.

Who knows? Maybe I'll revisit Jane and those mushrooms.

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*Diana Peterfreund was NINC's 2016 president. She writes YA and middle-grade novels as Diana and new adult romance as Viv Daniels.*

*For Further Reading, see [Tara Lazar's website](#).*



## Editor as Writer

Do you need an editor who feels your pain?

*By Jim Thomsen*



About fifteen years ago, while working as the night-and-weekend editor of a daily newspaper, I ran into some problems on a page-one story.

The reporter was a notoriously prickly personality who had been known to snap at copy editors when she felt they introduced outright errors or altered nuance into her articles. (Which they do sometimes. Don't ask me how I know this.) I was a little nervous as I approached her, as a first-time newsroom manager after a dozen years as a reporter, but it needed to be done.

I pointed out the problems I saw. She pursed her lips but held her tongue. And returned to her desk to make some phone calls and tackle the requested revisions. I had a few questions about her next draft that were received with more lip-pursing. But finally I sent a version we both could live with to the pre-press crew with fewer than five minutes to the night's drop-dead deadline.

The reporter then walked over to my desk.

"I don't like copy editors, and I have good reasons," she said.

I waited.

"But I like that you talked to me and didn't just slice-and-dice my copy." She paused and added, "I like that you were a reporter before you became a copy editor. You showed me that you get what it's like to be on my end of things. That you treated me the way I'm guessing you wanted to be treated when you were a reporter. That means a lot. So, thanks, even if I'm not happy to be going home so late."

I thought about that night as I worked last week on revisions to my own story, a fictional one, after the members of my critique group gave it a furious red-penning. They're not professional editors, but they're good writers. And more importantly, they're straight shooters who know what works and what doesn't work, who understand the limits of stringent self-editing. And that's just as good.

They humble me. They help me see that I can be blind in my own writing to what I see so clearly in the work of others, no matter how many times I go over it, no matter how often I go

through a list of questions I've adapted from one of my favorite writing-craft guides, James Scott Bell's *Write Great Fiction: Revision and Self-Editing*.

Just a few of my flaws:

- I info-dump too much, too soon. (Let me pause everything here so I can explain ....)
- I too often succumb to the luminous lure of lavishly lyrical prose. (I smoked a cigarette and stared at the laughing moon through the hummocks and hillocks and bunchgrass and apenglow and thought of tortured similes in the sibilant fricative.)
- I have a painfully pompous preteen propensity for annoying alliteration. (What he cynically but semi-concisely said.)
- I'm too prone to using too much stage-managing in my action passages. (I say this as I move opposite of you to the far wall from the south corner and shift my left foot while tensing my right hand and take two steps forward and ...)

I was astonished at what my fellow critique partners had found:

"Why do your characters play with their hands so much?" wrote one.

"I don't understand what her motivation is to ask him to commit murder," wrote another. "I think we need an emotional reaction here."

Yet another wrote: "Where are we? Give me a sense of place."

And: "This backstory info would probably read better as dialogue than narrative."

And there was one note: "Wait, what? I thought she still loved her husband, last we saw two pages before. How did we get here? I'm confused."

In other words, the sort of stuff I routinely red-flag in my clients' manuscripts.

Hoo boy.

I might have pursed a lip or two. But once I unpursed, I realized:

- About three-fourths of the comments were spot-on, something I could see only when I got out of the way of my own elephantine ego and allowed light to shine on my blind spots.
- Many of my critique partners praised the things they liked, which is something I realized I don't do often enough with my clients.
- Many of my critique partners seemed to do naturally what took me a long time to learn deliberately—which was to speak to the writing, not the writer. A lot of my early editorial letters said things like "You need to move this scene up in the story" and "You shouldn't over-describe your settings." It was only through having my own work marked up that I fully realized this: editing and critiquing is never a referendum on a person, only on the work.

Could I have developed this empathy if I'd been a non-writing editor?

I think it would have been a lot harder, honestly. It was hard enough to make the turn from a rigid grammar-and-style scold (as I was as a newspaper editor, and to some extent as a reporter) to someone who learned to not only accept but work within the primacy of voice in the narrative fiction and nonfiction that makes up the bulk of my editing practice.

That means the writer ultimately gets to do whatever they want to do. My job as a line editor shifted from correcting them to making them consistent within their own established style, to make a case for greater clarity wherever possible, and correcting only when there are

obvious objective errors (as opposed to conflating “style-guide nonconformity” with “mistakes”).

And, above all, suggesting changes in much the same spirit my critique partners do for me—I can take them or leave them, but I’m always better off considering them.

Sometimes it wasn’t easy. It’s OK to use run-on sentences or sentence fragments if they’re the writer’s deliberate stylistic choices, I’d have to repeatedly remind myself. It’s OK for a writer to tell, not show, if they’re writing a plot-driven story. If they want to open with three pages of weather, I can recommend against that, but I can’t delete that and impose my will.

From such mental Post-It notes came a mantra that has become the motto of my business: Clarity and consistency over correctitude. And keeping that in mind at all times has made me a better editor. And, slowly and surely—I hope—a better writer.

I was struck by something I sort of knew but often forgot to remember as I worked from one line to the next, both as an editor and a writer: It is a *heroic act* to finish a novel draft. To have confidence enough in your created world to carry it across the finish line. Because I haven’t yet done that.

Getting that face-slap of humility was necessary for the survival of my editing business. But it took the revival of my writing self to truly “get it” in that way that makes an author and a client click every bit as much as two people in a dating relationship. And that’s really what it takes if you want the kind of referrals (“best editor boyfriend ever!”) that build a lasting business. For me, and for the editor I eventually hire to help me make my novel a publishable one.

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*Jim Thomsen is a manuscript editor and writer who lives on Bainbridge Island, Washington. Find him at [jimthomsencreative.com](http://jimthomsencreative.com).*

# The Mad Scribbler

“Heave”

By Laura Resnick



*“In Nora Roberts’ books, the bosoms remain still. They do not heave.”  
—Peter Sagal, Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me (02/18/17)*

I don’t write romance novels anymore, but it’s how I started out in publishing. I wrote eleven books for Silhouette back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, followed by a small number of novels that I sold to one short-lived publishing program after another, with increasingly disappointing career results.

My last romance novel, which was a Rita Award finalist for Best Contemporary Romance (Nora Roberts won the award) was released in 2003. By then, *every* romance house I had written for (memory fades, but I think there were five) had either dumped me or gone out of business while I was under contract. During those years, I also amassed an impressive collection of rejection letters from romance publishers, as well as an enormous pile of romance proposals I couldn’t sell.

Whether you view your career mathematically or emotionally, whether you make professional decisions logically or on the basis of gut instinct, I think almost anyone with my career pattern as a romance novelist would have made a similar decision by that point—to pack up and move on. Particularly since, by the time my last romance novel was released to flattering reviews but blushing modest sales, things were going well for me in fantasy, the genre I had started transitioning into some years earlier.

Fantasy is what I still write, and I have a much better career there than I ever did in romance—probably because I’m better at writing it than I was at writing romance.

Funny how that works out.

However, because I got started in romance, I still have many friends who write it, and I still feel a certain identification with the genre. So it seems rather silly that I was out of touch enough with reality to feel surprised by the contents of an interesting essay I recently stumbled across by *Washington Post* columnist and best-selling romance novelist Sarah MacLean.

Titled “Bashing Romance Novels Is Just Another Form of Slut-Shaming,” it was published in September 2016 on *Bustle*, an online magazine that is “for and by women”—a slogan that certainly sounds familiar to me. The feminist relevance of romance fiction was being recognized by romance writers (if not yet by feminists beyond our genre) back when I was writing it, and we took pride in writing the only genre that was “for, by, and about women” in a world where male characters were otherwise still the default setting in fiction.

Yes, obviously there were already plenty of female protagonists in other genres at the time; but, outside of the romance genre, a female protagonist was a *woman* detective, a *lady* astronaut, a *female* lawyer, etc.

As Catharine Drew Gilpin Faust said in a 2007 speech: “I’m not the woman president of Harvard University. I’m the president of Harvard University.”

Romance was—and still is—the genre where it was never a novelty, let alone a controversy, that a woman was the lead character. It was the one genre where no one—not publishing executives, authors, readers, or reviewers—ever complained, argued, muttered, or alternately bragged about there being too high a percentage of women writers or female lead characters.

That was among the various reasons I chose to write romance at the start of my career. Having been raised by a writer, I knew that breaking into publishing (as well as keeping a career going) would be very challenging. So I was drawn to a genre where my gender would be a non-issue rather than a potential drawback.

The unremarkable normalcy of being a woman in the romance genre was something I missed after I moved to science fiction and fantasy. Although there has been considerable improvement in recent years, tension still exists over the subject and the reality of women in science fiction and fantasy, both as writers and as protagonists.

This includes (but is certainly not limited to) snide insinuations—and sometimes bald accusations—that still emerge from some certain quarters when a woman gets a prestigious nomination or award in SF/F: she’s not being recognized for excellence, she’s just benefitting from people pandering to gender issues and political correctness.

So it should not have surprised me—especially not as someone who had similar experiences throughout my years as a romance writer—when romance novelist Sarah MacLean’s essay described being asked (loudly, at a *funeral*, by the way) if she still writes “sex books.” She was also described in conversation as writing “smut books.” A feminist academic introduced Sarah as the author of “bodice rippers,” and not in a nice way (if there is one). MacLean says she is still regularly asked when she’s going to write a *real* book.

Anyone who has written romance—indeed, anyone who has even sat next to a romance writer in public for an hour—is familiar with such comments. As well as with the inevitable query, “Do you research your sex scenes ... personally?” (Oh, my goodness! Your effervescent wit and razor-tongued originality shall inspire me to such unbridled mirth that my bodice might rip!)

In a recent interview on NPR’s *Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me*, host Peter Sagal (of whom I am a fan) asked bestseller Nora Roberts, one of the best-known writers in America, “And you don’t like to do, like, the heaving bosom stuff and the Fabio?”

Nora said no, they exchanged a joke or two about bosoms, and they moved on. Most of the

discussion focused on how prolific she is (one of the regulars on the program asked her if she was writing while they were actually talking to her), how she got started, how she wound up additionally writing as J.D. Robb, and so on.

But there it was, the “heaving bosom stuff” question that every romance writer is always asked. It’s as if bringing up the subject of bodices, bosoms, and sex is a *requirement* when speaking to a romance writer, the way that removing your shoes and shedding personal dignity is a requirement of air travel.

(By the way, since Fabio’s name is often used in the context of joking or ridicule, I want to mention that in the few accounts I’ve heard from people who dealt with him directly, he was always described as courteous and professional.)

Anyhow, I suppose one stumbling block I keep tripping over whenever I read an account like Sarah MacLean’s *Bustle* essay is that WE’RE IN THE SECOND DAMN DECADE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST FREAKIN’ CENTURY AND RECEIVING PHOTOS TRANSMITTED FROM MARS AND PLUTO, FOR CHRISSAKE! So I foolishly thought that perhaps some of this tedious nonsense that belongs in another century had become less common these days.

Wrong again, Watson.

In fact, we still seem to be perpetually trapped in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. It’s a book I personally prefer to read as an adventure about tracking and killing a supernatural monster who has peculiar sleeping arrangements, but it is undeniably a revealing and/or neurotic exploration of Victorian’s society’s terror of female sexuality.

Evil female beings in the novel are depicted as sexual; their carnal appetite is the Big Clue that they’re evil. By contrast, good women are depicted as pure and chaste, with the same level of sexual curiosity that one would normally find in an overcooked stalk of broccoli. After Count Dracula sinks his teeth into Lucy, for example, her “purity” turns into “voluptuous wantonness.” And so the good guys, most of whom had previously wanted to marry her, naturally have to drive a stake through her heart now.

In her essay, MacLean writes, “But once women begin thinking about sexual pleasure, things get particularly terrifying. It begins with sexual parity [such as the romance genre’s portrayal of a woman having the right to find pleasure in sex] and ends ... where? What will women want after orgasmic equality? Equal opportunity? Equal pay? Equality, full stop?”

As it happens, all of my fantasy novels have included romantic relationships and/or sexual encounters ... and yet I don’t recall anyone who comments on those books ever ridiculing the sexual content, smirking, using the word smut, or asking how I “researched” the sex—all of which people did when I wrote romance novels.

MacLean’s article recalls another comment romance writers often hear, the “concern” that their novels give women unrealistic expectations. Such concern-trolling is commonly applied to this genre in which two people who are attracted to each other have good sex and get married ... yet not applied to genres in which characters typically have magical powers, or a misfit of modest birth discovers he was born to save the world, or human crews roam the galaxy on starships (and keep encountering alien beings who speak English), or an enthusiastic elderly gardener with no police qualifications keeps solving homicide cases.

So my sadly unrealistic expectation is that perhaps someday people will stop laying this

trip on romance writers.

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*Laura Resnick apologizes to male romance writers, whom she did not willfully intend to exclude from the picture, but she was on a roll.*



*Founded in 1989*

### **NINC Statement of Principle**

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

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- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

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## Central Coordinator

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

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