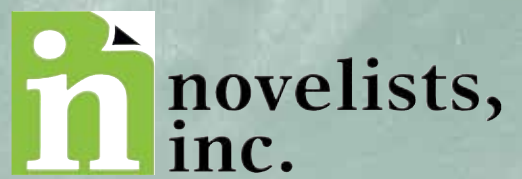




The official newsletter  
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a professional organization  
of writers of popular fiction



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# *Nink* June 2021

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# President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



*"Change is the only constant in life."*

—Heraclitus

For so many of us, last year was all about treading water: we did whatever we had to do to keep our heads above the waves. Maybe we kept writing, or maybe we struggled every day to get more than a sentence or two on the page. Maybe we published a record number of books, or maybe we didn't publish at all.

As an organization, NINC also focused on doing what we had to do in order to get through 2020. We adapted and adjusted and worked together to make sure our lines of communication stayed open—the Ninlink loop, the Facebook group, and of course, our wonderful newsletter *Nink*—so that even as we were all distanced and separated, we still stay connected. We managed to host a conference, even if it wasn't exactly business as usual.

Still, sometimes treading water requires so much energy that we can't concentrate on other goals. Early in 2020 (pre-pandemic), NINC established the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, something I've mentioned here more than once. I'm proud of our committee—and I hope you all are too. Last year, we tried to find our footing, but everyone was understandably distracted. This year, we've established some important goals, including having at least one *Nink* article per quarter authored by one of our DEI members.

In this issue, you'll find the second quarterly article by one of our committee members. Lynn Emery interviewed three authors who will help us continue a necessary conversation about marginalized writers, diversity, and progress—or the deplorable lack of it.

The DEI Committee is also consulting with our Programming Chair Lisa Hughey as we invite Featured Guest Speakers to the September conference. Their insight and advice is much appreciated. We're continuing to explore new ways for the committee to help us become the best resource and support for all of our members.

Change—even good, positive change—can be challenging. As an organization that is growing and evolving, NINC is in the midst of and will continue to experience shifts in the future. Your leadership is always working to make sure we're maintaining focus on our core mission even while we determine the direction in which we should stretch a little. Grow a little. Change a little.

I understand that this isn't always easy. Change requires patience and strength and grace, and we appreciate that we see such patience and grace in our members almost all of the time.

British writer Alan Watts said, "The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance." I hope that as we step into the rest of 2021—and beyond—we'll all join the dance together.

Tawdra Kandle

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*Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today bestselling romance author with over 100 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.*

## **About NINC**

NINC remains committed to serving all of our members, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

## **About *Nink***

*Nink's* goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members; [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

## **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](#).

## **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/>



Good news NINC members! We **re-opened registration** for the conference in early June. Just a few reminders:

1. If you have to cancel for any reason other than a medical emergency (COVID travel restrictions are not a medical emergency), the refund policy is 80 percent of your registration fee.
2. If you are *not* vaccinated, you need to wear your mask inside during presentations and in the general meeting areas.
3. We strongly urge any member with high risk factors to wear their masks. Attendees assume their own risk for coming to the conference.
4. Registration will be capped at a total of 400. (Assistant registration will be capped at 10 percent of the total attendees.)

See you at the beach!

P.S.: See below for a small list of contracted speakers. As we receive the contracts from the balance of our speakers we will update the membership.

- Mark Dawson
- Becca Syme
- Ines Johnson
- Malorie Cooper
- Sara Wells
- Adriana Herrera
- Dave Chesson

# Promo Advice that Works

*By Michele Dunaway*



On Ninlink, someone shared Ines Johnson's article "[How I Make Six Figures as a Self-Published Author](#)," which followed a discussion on how to get a BookBub Featured Deal (BBFD). To not repeat all the great things Johnson said, I'm going to use her article and bounce off it. I'm also going to bounce off the article Ashley McConnell shared Feb. 18, "[9 Reasons a Book was Rejected for a BookBub Featured Deal](#)."

Johnson writes that she runs "measurable marketing campaigns," or in terms of this article, promotions. She mentions newsletter swaps, BBFDs, display ads, and other paid promotions.

## Newsletter swaps and social media

[Wayne Stinnett](#), an author also making six figures a year, says his newsletter is his number one promotional tool.

"I don't advertise a release unless it's the first book in a series," Stinnett said. "I rely on the strength of my newsletter. It's taken a while to build, and my readers must go to my website, find the link, and click to subscribe. Then they get an email asking them to opt in. These are the kind of subscribers you want. Free book readers simply want free."

Stinnett started his promotional efforts in February 2014 with nine subscribers and two books released.

"I average three new subscribers a day," he said. "Over time that builds up. I don't offer free books. I don't give my subscribers anything. My readers want information on the books."

Like Johnson, who swaps newsletters, Stinnett cross-promotes via his newsletter with other members of his [Tropical Authors group](#).

[Nicole Evelina](#) also cross-promotes with other authors, but she does it via social media, which is her top promotional go-to. She targeted social media, including Pinterest, specifically when she set her goal to make the *USA Today* Best-Selling Books list. Evelina has about 1,200 followers on Twitter and 600 on Instagram.

“Don’t spam them,” Evelina said, “but also ask your author friends who you know to help you.”

As for posting, Evelina suggests no more than two times a day.

“I do both a.m. and p.m. as different people check their social media at different times,” Evelina said. “At the minimum, do one time a day in whatever form of social media you can think of and are comfortable using when you are running a promotion.”

Evelina also suggests having a “hook” in your posts.

“Tie it into something people are already talking about,” she said. “For instance, when I was trying to make the *USA Today* list, *Game of Thrones* had just ended. So I tied into that, saying ‘Missing *Game of Thrones*? Here’s what to read next.’ You want to be consistent with your tagline and branding. That way when readers see the same thing in multiple places, it makes them wonder, ‘What if I’m missing something?’”

## BookBub Featured Deals

BBFDs are BFDs (\*Big Freaking Deals). Really.

“The number of people BookBub reaches is very powerful,” Evelina said. “The United States is the holy grail, although foreign deals do expand readership.”

According to Stinnett, one of the biggest reasons for rejection is timing. BookBub knows when an author or book was last featured and the rules are pretty clear.

Stinnett submits a book at least twice a week for a discounted feature of 99 cents. The day it’s rejected, he submits it again for free. He’s had 26 featured deals in seven years.

“When the freebie is rejected, I move on to book two in the series and do the same thing. That’s the second week. In week three, I submit book one in the spin-off series, and in week four, the second book, first at 99 cents and then for free. By then the first book in the first series is usually eligible again,” Stinnett said.

[Cindy Procter-King](#) goes backward when compared to Stinnett, which proves that there is no one perfect method.

“I submit it free and then submit at 99 cents,” Procter-King said. “For some reason that has worked for me, and it was a shock when it did, so I have done it a few times now. The trick is to submit the new price point right away.”

[Jennifer Ashley](#) keeps a list of books for which she wants a BookBub deal.

“When one is rejected, I submit the next one the next day or day after. I keep going until I get one,” Ashley said.

[Brenda Hiatt](#), who has had 37 BBFDs since 2015, mentioned filling in the comments field when applying.

“I always put something in there. It’s a great place to use great review quotes or author blurbs, or any other pluses you can think of (*USA Today*, NYT, first book in a series),” Hiatt said.

Stinnett goes farther, saying “Put something in the comment box they can’t know and can’t look up themselves. One time I was at a loss for something to put there and just wrote ‘I’m open to any day you might have available.’ I was accepted the next day with that one and it was for a week away.”

One key to a solid BBFD is to stack ads around it, which is what Evelina does.



“It takes a lot of work and effort to make a BBFD work,” she said. “Work backwards from your Featured Deal date and build the other stuff around it. One thing I learned is that BookBub will change your date if you don’t like what they’ve given you. You may wait, but you’ll know earlier. Many times the ad companies are full, so knowing your date ahead of time will allow you to stack around it.”

BBFDs offer a long tail—the sales can last a full month or two after the day the deal runs, so there is an extended benefit beyond the deal, which is why Evelina said the ad stacking worked. She suggests having a BBFD earlier in the week because if you are trying to hit a list, they start counting sales on Monday.

“I don’t do a deal until I have a series because box sets tend to do better for lesser known authors than single books,” she said. “Being rejected isn’t about the quality of the book. I applied eight times before my first one. The competition is also much higher now as more people get wise to how it works.”

### **Display ads and other promotions**

Advertising depends on goals and timing. When Evelina was trying to hit the list, stacking the ads around her BBFD was critical. Otherwise she hasn’t found ads to pay off.

“Facebook ads don’t work for me,” she said. “I found boosting posts via my page to work much better.”

For Stinnett, advertising occurs when launching a new series.

“I spend all my advertising dollars on the first book in a series,” Stinnett said. “An Amazon rank is a mathematical equation. If you sell 1,000 books in an hour, you might make the top 200, but then in the next hour you might drop to top 2,000. If you spread that out over three days, say 500 day one, 300 day two, and 200 day three, you’ll stay in the top 200.”

Stinnett advises building up to ads.

“Start small, maybe even a \$100 budget,” he said. “If your ads do all right, put that money back in. Don’t be afraid to start slow and build ad revenue, build your newsletter.”

Stinnett spends directly on ads, suggesting you want a 50 percent cost or less. For example, \$1 spent in ads should gain \$1 in sales to break even. If \$1 equals \$2 in sales, that’s 50 percent. If \$1 equals \$3 in sales, that’s 30 percent. Stinnett tracks his ads and sales daily to see trends, calling it “a habit.”

“I’ve found January is a good month to advertise,” Stinnett said. “People just got a new Kindle and they are looking for books so they can use it. Summer is when the reader is out doing things and not reading as much. And every Valentine’s Day, I expect a huge drop in sales.”

### **Final thoughts**

Both Evelina and Stinnett suggested making sure you have a schedule, and that price points matter. For Evelina, the more she discounted her trilogy, the better her BookBub did. Evelina leaves hers around \$4.99 for a single book or \$9.99 for a boxed set and drops to 99 cents.

For Stinnett, newer books cost more than those at the beginning of the series. His pricing varies from \$3.99 to \$7.99.

“If it’s a good story, people will pay for it,” Stinnett said. “If they like the stories, they will read the series beyond the trilogy.”

When asked what they wish they would have known earlier, Stinnett and Evelina had some advice.

“I made all the mistakes,” Stinnett said. “Then I found groups like NINC. New authors can go and get the information now.”

“I wish I would have pushed harder for the U.S. BBFD,” Evelina said. “You do not need to check both U.S. and international. If you want just U.S., check that box only.”

Both Stinnett and Evelina also reiterated two things about the books themselves and how to reach readers.

“I write books I like to read,” Stinnett said. “So if I find an ad compelling, others will as well.”

“It’s always about a good book or it won’t work,” Evelina said. “Even if it’s quantity, quantity, quantity, you also need that quality.”

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*Michele Dunaway writes contemporary romance and teaches high-school English and journalism full time. She’s currently at work on two new series.*

# The Official Record

## Me, in my own words

*By Sandra Kitt*



*Editor's note: NINC invited Sandra Kitt to share her story as a pioneer in the publishing industry with our members.*

Yes, it's true that I am the first African American to publish with Harlequin, the Canadian publishing mammoth known worldwide for the most enduring and creative line of romance novels in publishing history. I didn't make this discovery until after I'd published my third book with Harlequin and realized through simple research (I'm a former librarian) that I was the only African American writer consistently published in the burgeoning romance genre of the early 1980s. To admit to this longevity doesn't make me feel as much ancient as it does experienced. Those early years put me on an important and necessary path to learning how publishing worked. Learning quickly helped to keep me in the game. And, to be honest, I can't recall if Harlequin ever publicly acknowledged that I am their first Black writer.

I'd made my entry into the industry with two of my first manuscripts being chosen for the then American Romance imprint from Harlequin. It was a new line of stories set in America, written by American writers. It was an immediate and remarkable beginning for me, made more so by my gradual discovery that no one in publishing was prepared for a Black writer to break in, and *stay* for decades. I slowly began to experience a little pushback as I advanced within the genre with stories that were not the norm for romances. At the time, the industry seemed to have a fixed belief that only white men and women fell in love. I entered their space with a wider worldview that romance novels prior to my entry had not realistically explored.

I was told I didn't really write "romance." I already knew that. I didn't write what I sometimes read as formulaic linear stories. Women's fiction as a category didn't exist at the time and, since my stories did have romantic relationships, by default I was whack-a-moled into the box marked romance. My stories were big, complex, sub-plotted, and interjected with social and familial issues never covered before in romance novels. I wrote interracial romances (for sure a

first) and included the male point of view (another first), but editors couldn't deny the strong romantic element that tied the stories together, and which found a following among readers. Penguin Putnam helped me climb higher for a while, when it published *The Color of Love*, a controversial interracial story, in 1995 simply as mainstream fiction.

The book never made any bestseller list, but was critically acclaimed by *USA Today*, was optioned by HBO and Lifetime, and is still available more than 25 years later. Obviously, outside the periphery of romance, other sources saw creative merit in my work. The late director Jonathan Demme passed on an early suspense my agent pitched to him, but with the caveat "... tell her to keep writing." I went on to publish with nearly every traditional publisher from the '80s through the early aughts of this century. Until my latest book, *Winner Takes All*, my last book was published in 2010 from Kimani, another Harlequin imprint. It would seem that I had, unbelievably, come full circle.

On the surface my publishing trajectory appears charmed. And it was. I was being interviewed, profiled, and invited to national book festivals that were then popping up all over the country, sponsored by such publications as the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*. For a time, I was sent on yearly book tours and lectured at universities, local libraries, and special-interest groups and organizations. I met an incredible array of writers both inside and outside of romance, many who've become long-standing friends. I've been championed by editors and publishers, who seemed to admire what I'd accomplished in my first 10 years as a published author. They all saw that I had longevity and possible staying power.

But, as one powerful industry executive said to me, "They don't know what to do with you." I was, apparently, an anomaly. Different. This, along the way, led to a series of unfortunate and terrible incidents that, while I was enjoying undeniable success, also made me aware of subtle and not-so-subtle ways I was being sabotaged and held back. Some support seemed slipshod, haphazard, indifferent. And yet...was it really racial, or just instances of trusting and expecting too much from professionals who were not always competent or up to the demands of their own positions? Had I contributed by too often giving in, going against my own better and sometimes more reliable instincts? But yes, some of it was racial.

Editorial changes were made randomly without consideration of consequences; promises were broken that often worked against actually helping my work succeed. Despite saying that I would be published in hardcover, publishers broke that contract promise without a word of excuse or explanation. I was scammed outright on one contract after bailing out a publisher on a project for which they couldn't find a writer. The end result was not only humiliating but dispiriting.

I waited for the larger industry acceptance that I had a contribution to make, that I was breaking new ground that publishers could have benefited from if they'd been able to see beyond the obvious—that I was a Black romance author—and were willing to develop a "wider and newer worldview" of their own. I believe even now it was a missed opportunity.

*Adam and Eva* unexpectedly became an early classic for Harlequin, reissued and printed several times. But when it was picked up by the Italian affiliate of Harlequin for sale in Europe, the cover art was a painting of a *white* couple, instead of the Black characters the book was

about. I understood perfectly why that decision was made. Nevertheless, I charged the editorial decision with being disrespectful and bigoted, perpetrating a lie on book buyers.

I once had an editor confess that the publisher would *never* inform me that I was among their top 25 bestselling writers (Were they afraid to admit that a Black writer was able to compete creatively?), and I was left out of any and all promotions that noted those writers. One publisher kept a “milestone” list for writers based on how many books they’d published. When I knew I’d made that milestone, the criteria was suddenly changed and I no longer qualified.

I eventually came to learn that I could not depend on all publishers to market me with any kind of insight or real knowledge of *me*. Being easy to work with might have been a mistake on my part. But when you’re the “first” you step quietly, you watch and listen, and trust that your publisher and editors want what you want—for the book to do well so that *everyone* benefits. I was disappointed that the industry as a whole, and some of my publishers in particular, never saw the importance of sharing or exploiting my value as a writer of color, or making an effort to capitalize on me being “the first” in their midst. The publishers could have been seen as progressive. Instead, I saw the situation, in part, as a loss of energy, time, and talent from everyone.

But, here’s the thing. I have done more as a published writer, a second career I hadn’t really anticipated, than I could have imagined. I came into the industry, into a specific genre, that was growing exponentially and earning more money than any other segment of the publishing industry *ever*. It is not a stretch to say everyone knew my name, knew who I was. I found genuine support in publishers who sought me to write for them even though sometimes just getting into print was not enough, and their efforts fell flat.

I absolutely love writing, creating, pulling together my themes and premises with a host of characters that I believe in...adore...and root for. I loved working with editors who got my voice and didn’t try to force me onto paths ill suited to me, or to satisfy a misplaced and always-changing expectation, or a target audience. I love the editors who fought for me in their meetings, trying to convince their team that what I’d written, that *I*, was worth fighting for. I loved the bookstore owners and sales staff who championed my books by chatting up the stories with their customers. The librarians and teachers, the readers I’ve met who validated what I’d written with their praise and support. Yes, it fed my ego. All of which forces me to remain true to *me* and my stories, and my view of the world that is only getting *wider*, to explore, to include...and to write about how we love.

To learn more about my journey, watch my interview with Jayne Ann Krentz on [Facebook](#). I’m still here.

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*Sandra Kitt's The Color of Love was issued in 1995 to critical acclaim. Girlfriends, an anthology from HarperCollins, was nominated for the NAACP Image Award for Fiction in 1999. The first Black writer to publish with Harlequin, she launched Arabesque, the first African American romance imprint in 1994. She has designed cards for UNICEF and illustrated books for the late Dr. Isaac Asimov. Her most recent project is a trilogy, The Millionaires Club. The first book in the series is Winner Takes All. She is represented by Lisa Erbach Vance with the Aaron Priest Agency in New York.*

# New Worlds, Different Voices

By Lynn Emery



Diversity and inclusion discussions have become big news lately. For writers, hashtags like #ownvoices, #whatpublishingpaidme, and #weneeddiversebooks have led to reasoned and sometimes heated exchanges.

I'm pleased to introduce NINC members to accomplished authors who can continue the conversation.

[L. Penelope](#) writes fantasy and paranormal romance. Her first novel, *Song of Blood & Stone* was chosen as one of *Time Magazine's* 100 Best Fantasy Novels of All Time and won an award for Best Fiction from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.

[Nicole Givens Kurtz](#) is an author, editor, and educator. She's the recipient of the Horror Writers Association's Diversity Grant (2020). She's been named as one of Book Riot's Best Black Indie SFF Writers. She's also the editor of the groundbreaking anthology, *Slay: Stories of the Vampire Noire*. Her novels have been finalists in the Dream Realm Awards, Fresh Voices, and EPPIE Awards for science fiction.

[Milton Davis](#) is an indie author and publisher specializing in science fiction and fantasy based on African/African Diaspora. He's published 22 novels, edited and coedited nine anthologies and has been published in various magazines and anthologies. His script *Ngolo*, written with Balogun Ojetade, won the 2014 Urban Action Showcase Best Screenplay award and his stories "The Swarm" and "Carnival" were nominated for the British Science Fiction Association Short Fiction award in 2017 and 2020 respectively.

## What does diversity, equity, and inclusion in publishing look like to you?

**L. Penelope:** *The New York Times* recently conducted a survey of books published by traditional presses. In 2018, just 11 percent of the books in their survey were written by authors

of color. A simple way to determine if things are getting better is when those numbers approach the statistical rate of people of color in America, which is currently 40 percent.

**Nicole G.K.:** Diversity, equity, and inclusion in publishing looks like a variety of ethnicities and races in film and television writing rooms.

**Milton D.:** Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the publishing industry would be POC (People of Color) behind the scenes actively participating in the day-to-day decisions in the industry.

### **Is mainstream publishing “getting it right” with diversity efforts/moves recently made?**

**L. Penelope:** Some of the things publishing has done, like recognizing the need to diversify their staff and acquire more books from authors of color, have been very useful.

**Nicole G.K.:** Some mainstream publishers are getting it right and some aren't. For example, some publishing companies are actively seeking diverse stories, but it's only in gesture, not in action. They ask for them, but don't accept or publish them. They state they want Black stories, but only a certain *type* of story.

**Milton D.:** While more POC are being published, there are still many hurdles to clear, such as fair advances and equal marketing and exposure.

### **Has your research turned up facts that blow apart myths about BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)?**

**L. Penelope:** Controversies about whether there should be Black and brown folks in various settings such as Medieval Europe or Regency England are based in ignorance. This argument doesn't stand up to reality and there is plenty of scholarship and research that proves it. One such source is [Medieval POC](#).

**Nicole K.:** When people state they can't find these stories, it's because they're not looking or have a prejudice against independently published or small press published works. It's out there.

**Milton D.:** My focus has been on creating my own work to add to tell the stories I've always wanted to read and to create the very examples you describe.

### **The question of “getting it right” frequently comes up. How do you approach writing about groups you either don't belong to and aren't familiar with?**

**L. Penelope:** I approach it the way I do with all characters or cultures, even those I invent—with empathy.

**Nicole G.K.:** You do the work to get it right by doing research and asking multiple people in those cultures to read what you've written to ensure you didn't write something offensive or incorrect.

**Milton D.:** I think first and foremost you have to approach it with true respect for the people and culture and leave all preconceived notions at the door.

### **What are your recommendations to other writers about creating characters of different physical/sensory abilities, races, ethnicities, gender identity?**

**L. Penelope:** I like to read first-hand accounts from people, whether it's an autobiography, a blog or social media post, or a web forum discussion. If the idea of interviewing someone you don't know makes you break out in hives, then lurk on a message board or join a Facebook group to observe discussions going on by real people living in that community.

**Nicole G.K.:** No group is a monolith, so gather several beta readers who will provide feedback.

**Milton D.:** The best place to start is talking to the people themselves if you can. Get the personal perspective before you dive into the research. And talk to more than one person.

### **How do you approach research to help you showcase a whole different culture? This speaks to world building.**

**L. Penelope:** Since I'm a fantasy writer, I'm often creating new worlds, a task which does require research about the way our world works. Even when I'm doing something quite different, I want to ensure it's based in reality so that it's believable.

**Nicole G. K.:** When world building, I research via online encyclopedias, museums, historical sites, etc. I also see if I can find an established authority in those fields and attempt to get them to discuss or answer questions for me about the world I am building.

**Milton D.:** I begin locating different history books and articles on the subject. I also pay attention to archeological work as well, because it tends to be less biased than history books.

### **Your fiction includes fantastic world building and those worlds are diverse. What non-white (European/western) cultures/histories have you researched for your fiction?**

**L. Penelope:** I specifically did not want to base any of my cultures on just one existing culture, but a variety of them, to avoid any sort of appropriation. I researched desert societies all over the world from Africa and the Middle East to North America when I was creating my fictional desert country.

**Nicole G.K.:** For *The Kingdom of Aves* mysteries, I searched both Ethiopian and Kenyan histories. My sons are adopted from Ethiopia and I had the pleasure of spending two weeks there. So, I had research materials here, already, on the country and its vast history.

**Milton D.:** I've studied the great Sahelian empires such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Kanem-Bornu. I've also studied the Swahili and Zulu cultures in addition to the cultures that influenced them, such as Arabic and Persian cultures.

### **What have you learned or now put into practice when it comes to world building?**

**L. Penelope:** I enjoy thinking about how people have built their societies holistically, looking at everything from economic systems, military structures, and transportation, to technology and media.



**Nicole G.K.:** Over the last 22 years of being a professional writer, I have come to use more images and videos to assist with building the worlds. Having a world bible for your series is one of the best practices I have learned when it comes to world building.

**Milton D.:** One of the things people tend to neglect is the effect geographical items have on cultures, such as mountains, rivers, and weather. I like to emphasize that. Then you begin to work with people.

### **What do you most want to convey, and/or achieve in your books and writing?**

**L. Penelope:** I believe that reading fiction creates empathy, and what I would like to achieve in my writing is to leave people a little more curious about others who are not like them.

**Nicole G.K.:** I want my books and my writings to convey the strength of Black women, but moreover our love for others.

**Milton D.:** My main objective is to write the kind of stories I like to read.

### **Finally, what's your best prediction for where the whole issue of diversity in publishing will look like in 1-2 years? Is it a fad or does it feel like lasting change will take place?**

**L. Penelope:** I think that the hiring initiatives for getting a more diverse spate of editors and agents, those who acquire and publish books, will be the biggest determining factor of whether lasting change takes place.

**Nicole G.K.:** I want to believe it is lasting change, but we have been at this point before in publishing. In order to have lasting change, publishing will need to be more inclusive from the top down in order for it to stick.

**Milton D.:** I have a feeling that diversity in publishing is here to stay for a number of reasons. The first is because of indie publishing. Another reason is the power of social media.

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*Lynn Emery has written 29 novels so far, one of which inspired the BET made-for-television movie, After All, based on her romantic suspense novel of the same name. She writes mysteries filled with secrets, betrayal, magic, and murder.*

# Fact-Checking Your Nonfiction

*By Nicole Evelina*



Fact-checking is perhaps more important today than ever before. Our readers have access to the same information we do and a handful of them like to point out errors. While this is embarrassing, it can also have serious negative effects on a career, even for the most seasoned pros. Look at Jill Abramson, a former executive editor of *The New York Times*. She was lambasted for errors in her book *Merchants of Truth*, for which she was accused of plagiarism and improper attribution of sources.

In most cases, publishing houses consider fact-checking the author's responsibility, as it is part of your final product. However, many nonfiction books are never fact-checked, according to multiple online sources and an informal poll of members of the Biographers International Organization.

Publishing a book or article without fact-checking is dangerous for both the author and publisher, so going through the process is highly recommended. You can hire a fact-checker, but you can also do it yourself. There are pros and cons to the DIY approach.

## **Pros:**

- You are the expert in your subject, so you know it better than most strangers would.
- If you do it yourself you'll know for sure it was done to your satisfaction.
- Should anyone question your accuracy, you can speak to how it was verified.
- It saves you money—anywhere from \$3,000 to \$10,000+ depending on the rate and the length of your book.

## Cons:

- You must learn how to fact-check, whereas if you hire someone, they are (hopefully) already an expert.
- After spending years researching and writing a book, you may be too close to the subject to check it objectively.
- Fact-checking takes a fair amount of time and determination.
- If something slips through, you are 100 percent accountable.

If you choose to do it yourself, I recommend reading *The Fact Checker's Bible* by Sarah Harrison Smith. It's an older book meant for fact-checkers who work with authors but is applicable when checking your own work as well. For a more recent book that covers fact-checking in the digital age, check out *The Chicago Guide to Fact-Checking* by Brooke Borel, which breaks fact-checking down by type (book, article, etc.) and by type of fact (basic facts, numbers, quotes, analogies, descriptions, etc.)

## Step One: Take good notes

Fact-checking begins while you're doing research. Anyone who has had to write a thesis or is trained in research knows the importance of documenting your sources. But this is not only true for the final book, article, etc.; it also applies to your notes. If you use footnotes or parenthetical documentation—which is (author last name, page number), for example (Evelina, 153)—with each one of your notes, it will make it easier for you to go back during your fact-checking process and make sure you are correct. And it is important to put that information with each fact you note down because you will likely move your notes around as you learn more. If you always keep the source citation with the note, you won't run the risk of not remembering where it came from.

When working in archives, if they allow you to take non-flash photos of source material, do so. You will thank yourself not only when writing the book, but even more so when you fact-check. If the archive doesn't allow photography, ask to photocopy the source or scan into a PDF. There is usually a method available, though you may wish to ask if there are restrictions on use (i.e. can you use the photo in your book/article? Are you allowed to post it online?)

Also, don't discount the value of a bibliography. I keep a running list of every source I consult while researching. Then once I've written the book, I copy that list to another file and delete the sources that didn't make it into the final book. That way, if I realize I failed to cite something or need to go back, I still have a full list of sources in addition to the bibliography that will appear in the back of the book or on my website (if the book has only a list of major sources.)

## Step Two: Identify the facts

Hopefully you'll have time away from your manuscript before fact-checking so you can look at it with fresh eyes. Read through and underline every statement of fact you will need to

check. Borel advises to read your work from the perspective of someone who is skeptical of your approach or wants to find errors. Highlight what they might question.

### **Step Three: Double-check your sources**

The first thing you should do to check a fact is look back at your notes and confirm they match. Then if you have the source material at hand, do a second check. If it is archival material that you can't easily access, you have two choices: you can email the archive and see if they will either fact check it for you or send you an electronic copy of what you need or hope your notes are accurate. Obviously, the first is preferable, but sometimes you don't have that option.

### **Step Four: Look for generalizations and exaggerations**

It's very easy to write in sweeping generalizations and nearly everyone does at least once in a draft. (See what I did there? Even that sentence contains both.) Hopefully your editor caught most of them but go back and mark any that you see. Is there a way you can hone what you mean to be more accurate? These types of statements aren't as serious as plagiarism, but they can annoy readers, make you look like you don't know what you're talking about, and will bring out the ire of scholars.

### **Step Five: Check every single quote**

Be especially careful with quotes because you run the risk of being accused of defamation in the form of libel if they are inaccurate, especially if they create a negative impression of the source. If you have recordings of your interviews, listen to them again or review your handwritten notes. If feasible, run quotes you are unsure of by the source and get their approval in writing, especially if you don't have a recording to back you up.

With academic writing, this is less of a worry because those types of quotes are more informational than opinion, but make sure the facts in them are accurate. If you are quoting from unpublished source material (such as a letter, diary or other private correspondence held in an archive or personal collection) your quotes *must* be verbatim, misspellings, weird punctuation and all. Also, be sure you have permission from the estate or archival institution to quote from the source. (That is usually taken care of when you research at an archive, but if you are unsure, ask again.)

### **Step Six: Check for plagiarism**

We would all like to believe that we aren't guilty of plagiarism, but it can be easy to do inadvertently, especially when you are summarizing someone else's thoughts in your own words. Cite your source whether or not you are quoting them or paraphrasing them. Compare the words in your book/article to your source. Be on the lookout for any wording or phrases you wouldn't ordinarily use or that are overly formal. Those are good indicators that you need to double-check. Also, watch out for quotation marks that were accidentally removed in editing or citations that were lost when information was moved around.

If you doubt a quote or phrase, run it through Google with quotation marks around it. You'd be surprised how quickly it can find a source. That shouldn't be your only method of verification, but it is a place to start. As always, check your notes and the source.

Also, be aware that it is possible to plagiarize yourself. That can happen if you use your own writing in more than one place with the exact same (or really close) wording.

### **Supplemental help**

There is software that detects plagiarism, but many are only available to teachers/professors and educational institutions. However, several companies like [Grammarly](#) (\$11.66-\$12.50/month) and [Quetext](#) (\$9.99/month) offer low-cost online options where you copy/paste your text in. For a fee of \$19.95-\$39.95 you can use [Scribbr](#), which is considered by some as the most accurate and useful. Scribbr also has an add-on called [Own Sources Checker](#) that allows you to check unpublished sources. As of this writing, Own Sources is free if you use the regular Scribbr program. These types of programs can be useful in showing you potential errors, but they cannot and should not replace the steps outlined above.

Fact-checking can be one of the more arduous parts of writing nonfiction, but it is essential. You are better off double-checking everything now, instead of after someone questions or sues you. After all, you are an expert and your reputation—as well as your scholarship—can only benefit from extra due diligence.

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*Nicole Evelina is a USA Today bestselling author of nonfiction, historical fiction, and historical fantasy. She feels anyone's pain who follows the advice in this article, as she recently fact-checked her first biography. It wasn't fun, but now she can sleep better at night.*

# The Mad Scribbler

## When Elephants Fight

By Laura Resnick



*“In the face of Amazon’s dominance, book publishers have huddled together in search of safety.”*

—Franklin Foer, *The Atlantic*, November 2020

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a civil antitrust lawsuit against five of the publishing industry’s “Big Six” companies: HarperCollins, MacMillan, Simon & Schuster, Hachette, and Penguin (the sixth, Random House, was not involved). The lawsuit alleged that these five companies had colluded to raise and fix ebook prices, a plan they developed together to combat Amazon’s discount pricing practices.

Amazon, already a behemoth in terms of book sales, dominated the fast-growing ebook market from the start. The business consequences would be severe for any publisher that stood alone against Amazon’s pricing policy for digital books. But by banding together, those five publishers reasoned, they could oppose it successfully and push ebook prices higher.

Despite being big corporations which presumably had ready access to legal counsel, these publishers had apparently never heard of antitrust law, which has long served to protect consumers from price-fixing schemes. It didn’t take long for DOJ to notice what they were doing and launch a lawsuit, asserting that the publishers’ plan was an illegal conspiracy designed to eliminate retail price competition in the new field of ebook sales.

The U.S. Attorney General [said at the time](#), “As a result of this alleged conspiracy, we believe that consumers paid millions of dollars more for some of the most popular titles.”

Ultimately, the publishers settled the lawsuit and paid out enormous sums of money; the price-fixing scheme wound up costing each of them tens of millions of dollars.

That whole episode evinces how much power Amazon already wielded over the publishing world a decade ago (power which has only increased since then), how much of a threat publishers believed Amazon was, and how (though the scheme was clumsy, unlawful, and temporarily inflicted higher prices on ebook consumers) they tried to band together so they'd be strong enough to protect their own interests when dealing with Amazon.

And they were correct that standing alone against Amazon would be damaging. A couple of years after settling that lawsuit, Hachette spent much of 2014 in confrontation with Amazon, unable to reach an agreement over a new distribution deal. As the stand-off dragged on for months, Amazon reportedly slowed down fulfillment on customer orders for Hachette books, reduced warehousing of Hachette stock, removed pre-order buttons from upcoming Hachette releases, and no longer applied Amazon discounts to Hachette releases (which made prices on the publisher's books less attractive to consumers).

The two companies finally reached an agreement. But Hachette writers, who had no say in any of this, were hurt most of all, due to the biggest vendor of their books becoming a choke point for most of that year.

The struggles between massive corporations in our industry always remind me of an African proverb: When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.

Anyhow, publishers seem to have decided that getting *bigger* is the solution to their Amazon problem. The book business has seen a succession of mergers and consolidation in the past few years.

"To counter Amazon, publishers have sought to increase their bargaining power," journalist Franklin Foer recently [wrote](#) in the *Atlantic*. "They believe that they can match Amazon's size only by growing their own."

In 2013, the Big Six became the Big Five when Random House and Penguin merged into Penguin Random House (PRH). Now the Big Five are about to become the Big Four. PRH, the largest of the big publishers, announced a few months ago that it has reached an agreement to purchase Simon & Schuster, the third largest house. The resultant PRH/S&S international mega-publisher will publish 20-35 percent (estimates vary) of all books in the U.S., dominating the market to an unprecedented extent.

According to the [NYT](#), "The sale could also have a ripple effect throughout the literary ecosystem. The biggest houses are better equipped to negotiate favorable terms with major retailers like Amazon, Barnes & Noble and the big box stores, and are also able to develop direct-to-consumer marketing and sales networks so that they are not as dependent on retailers." The article also notes that this "will profoundly reshape the publishing industry, increasingly a winner-take-all business in which the largest companies compete for brand-name authors and guaranteed bestsellers."

The PRH/S&S merger will come under antitrust scrutiny (as the previous P + RH merger did). However, the planned merger has already been approved by the Competition and Markets Authority in the United Kingdom, though the Society of Authors there had raised concerns about the impact the merger could have on prices for consumers and contractual terms for authors. Here in the U.S., industry groups like the American Booksellers Association and the Authors Guild have publicly opposed the merger for similar reasons.

The Authors Guild has [asserted](#) (and I concur), “The number of large mainstream publishing houses will go from five to just four, further reducing competition in an already sparse competitive environment. For authors, it means there will be fewer competing bidders for their manuscripts, which will inevitably drive down advances offered.

“Less competition would make it even more difficult for agents and authors to negotiate for better deals, or for the Authors Guild to help secure changes to standard publishing contracts—because authors, even bestselling authors, wouldn’t have many options, making it harder to walk away.”

There is currently a range of speculation about what U.S. antitrust authorities will decide, but one might infer that U.K. regulatory approval is a sign that PRH can realistically hope for clearance in the U.S., too.

(And we have now completely exhausted my capacity for addressing subjects like antitrust law and regulatory approval.)

Meanwhile, the *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) this spring that HarperCollins, the second biggest publisher in the U.S., has reached an agreement to purchase Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books and Media for \$349 million.

“By acquiring Houghton Mifflin, HarperCollins... will be better able to compete as publishing has come to be dominated by the biggest players,” [reports](#) Alexandra Alter, who writes about books, culture, and publishing. “Consolidation often leads to more consolidation, as smaller companies try to bulk up to compete. Some analysts have warned that within a decade or so, the industry may be left with only two big publishing companies—Penguin Random House and HarperCollins.”

Anecdotally, I’ve seen several people in the publishing world predict lately that we’ll wind up with just *one* big publisher in the end.

Numerous agents, publishing professionals, and writers have raised concerns about such consolidation that are similar to the Authors Guild’s objections to the PRH/S&S merger: The fewer publishers there are and the more power they have, the fewer publishing markets exist for writers and the less power we have.

Moreover, the bigger publishers get, the more they focus on numbers rather than stories, on a few blockbusters rather than on a broad publishing list. When writing last year about consolidation and homogenization in the biggest publishing companies, Alter [reported](#) on several *profitable* imprints and subsidiaries that were shut down because, “The biggest houses are increasingly dependent on blockbuster titles and often plow more of their marketing and publicity budgets into books and authors with built-in audiences. Some in the industry worry that there are dwindling opportunities for new writers and that debut and midlist authors may get passed over.”

Additionally, the more power is consolidated by one or two mega-publishers, the more vulnerable small and mid-size publishers are. Here’s an example that Dennis Johnson, co-founder and publisher of Melville House, gives in a recent [article](#): “If you’re an independent or even a chain bookseller who gets, say, 50 percent of your fiction, 50 percent of your nonfiction, 50 percent of your kid’s books, and so forth from one giant publisher... well, it owns your checkbook. You are in its thrall. If that’s not bad enough, let’s say there’s, oh, I don’t know, a



*pandemic*, and your store's sales collapse. 'Sorry, every other publisher in the world, but I have to pay the big guy first, so I won't pay you and I'll in fact return your books to help myself pay that publisher.'"

And then the authors writing for those other houses see their sales nosedive, their contracts canceled, and/or their publishers go under.

It's easy to understand why publishers want more power, period, and particularly more power when dealing with Amazon. But it's equally easy to see too many ways in which fewer and fewer publishers controlling an enormous share of the publishing market isn't good for writers.

Indeed, it's no better for writers than just one mega-store controlling such a huge share of the retail book market.

Finally, the trend toward mega-publishers isn't a good sign for indie authors, either. Suppose that the Big Five do indeed become the Big Two (or One) within a decade, big enough to have real bargaining power with Amazon, a market that is crucial to indie authors. A market where those mega-publishers might not want to keep competing on an even playing field with effective indie pricing and promo strategies.

When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.

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*Laura Resnick writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction.*

## NINC Member Discounts

### My House of Design



*Shaila Abdullah of My House of Design*

Our featured discount this month is from Shaila Abdullah at [My House of Design](#).

My House of Design is an award-winning SBA 8(a) certified, minority- and woman-owned graphic design, marketing and communication firm in Austin, Texas, with over two decades of experience developing graphic, web, and multimedia solutions for government entities, corporations, nonprofits, and individuals.

Shaila, an author herself, has been a long-time supporter of NINC.

My House of Design will provide you with, among many other options, a content-managed website, book covers and interiors, and marketing materials. Email campaigns are available, and you're encouraged to visit their website for samples.

My House of Design has represented or is representing clients in publishing, among them *Publisher's Weekly*, *Modern History Press*, and Writer's League of Texas. You'll find multiple testimonials from satisfied clients [here](#).

Visit NINC's [Member Freebies & Discounts](#) page to learn how to access our discount.

# 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>

Follow NINC on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/Novelists\\_Inc](https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc)

## Conference:

Conference information: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

## 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/>

## Website (You must be logged in to access these 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: *A link to the new member packet will be included as soon as it's been updated.*

## 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

### **2021 Board of Directors**

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

- President: Tawdra Kandle
- President-Elect: Lisa Hughey
- Secretary: Hallee Bridgeman
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Lou Aronica

### **Advisory Council**

- Lou Aronica
- Brenda Hiatt Barber
- Linda Barlow
- Jean Brashear
- Janice Young Brooks
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- Donna Fletcher
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- Julie Ortolon
- Diana Peterfreund
- Pat Rice
- Erica Ridley
- Marianne Shock
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

## 2021 Committees

*Complete committee member listings are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.*

- 2021 Conference Committee
  - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
  - Programming Chair: Lisa Hughey
  - Assistant Prog. Chair: Tawdra Kandle
  - Traditional Publishing Liaison: Victoria Thompson
  - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
- Authors Coalition Representative: Laura Phillips
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
  - Hildie McQueen
  - Gwen Hernandez
  - Lynn Emery
  - Pamela Kelley
  - Pook Burroughs
  - Samantha Silver
  - Alison Perry
  - Misti Boehm
  - Harper St. George
  - Ellis Leigh
  - Malorie Cooper
- Social Media Committee: Violet Howe
- Membership Committee
  - Sarah Woodbury
  - Boyd Craven
- *Nink* Newsletter
  - Editor: Harper St. George
  - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
  - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
  - Production Manager: Laura Resnick

- Nominating Committee:
  - Malorie Cooper
  - Tanya Anne Crosby
  - Kristine Smith
  - Jenny Gardiner
  - Judi Fennell
- Discounts Program: Emilie Richards

### **Central Coordinator**

Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin  
P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353  
[admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com)

*Address changes may be made on the website.*

### **Nink Newsletter**

*June 2021 edition – Vol. 32, No. 6*

*Nink's* goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members.

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

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