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

# Ditching the “Book of Your Heart”

BY JULIE ELIZABETH LETO

I’ve always had a problem with the phrase, “The Book of Your Heart.” Maybe I’m not sentimental enough for such a term, but I don’t think that’s it entirely. I consider myself an emotional pragmatist. Yes, I believe in the “art” of writing, but I believe equally in the business and marketability. And I’ve never been one hundred percent sure what “the book of my heart” was, or even if I wanted to write it.

I like my books, each and every one, though some more than others. I get emotionally caught up in my characters all the time—and as a bonus, they sell rather well. So what am I writing? Luckily, at this year’s Ninc conference, I finally found out.

Whenever I heard someone speak passionately about “the book of the heart,” they seemed to preach that if this book doesn’t come from some place deep in your psyche, if this book doesn’t haunt you, if this book won’t possibly destroy your career, then it isn’t truly from your heart. Huh? I’m

all for over-the-top, but this sounds a little too much along the lines of the “starving artist” propaganda for me. We’re genre writers. We don’t need to starve! The market is too hungry for our art—and our product. Marketability is not a cop-out or a sell-out. It’s our business. It’s a means to reach the maximum number of readers with stories that we care about.

And there are other implications in that short little phrase, “The Book of Your Heart,” that can be very daunting. The main one, as evidenced by the article “the,” is that there is only one book in your heart and that you likely have only one story that has lingered inside your aortic chambers, waiting to burst forth and be told. So you write that book. It earns a multi-million-dollar advance and is optioned for a film. Or, it tanks. Or worse, no one will buy it at all. Now what? Do you lament that “the New York publishing establishment isn’t ready for something so fresh, so bold?” Come on. The New York publishing establishment may have its limitations just like any other business, but they’re as anxious for fresh and bold as we are.

Before the recent Ninc conference, the only alternative I’d heard to writing the book of your heart has become writing “The Book of Your Wallet.” That, I could identify with. But it also has negative implications that nagged me—saying in essence that I’m writing a book only for the cash. We’ve all met people who’ve boasted that they plan to pound out a few genre books and make some easy money so they can afford to retreat to their bucolic cabin to write *The Great American Novel*, which in essence, is *The Book of The Heart*. And we’ve all wanted to shoot these people. So the wallet phrase rubs me the wrong way, too. I’ve never aspired to writing *The Great American Novel*. I aspire to a career writing book after entertaining book, acquiring a legion of readers who enjoy the stories I like to tell.

I wish I could remember which editor used the term, “The Book of Your Voice,” because I’d send her large amounts of chocolate. The cost of the entire Ninc conference was justified, for me, in that one phrase.

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# THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

**As I write, this column was due yesterday.** Maybe the day before yesterday, depending on when I manage to finish. Do you ever have the feeling you're always a day late and a dollar short? Ever wonder how you got there? Pardon me while I borrow a few blank pages of the Curmudgeon's diary. . .

**Day 5 before the column is due:** I don't have a topic for the column yet, but I just received my line edit and need to figure out how to proceed with my revisions. I'll think about the column tomorrow, when I'm not pounding my head against the desk.

**Day 4:** How can I revise a book for an editor who Just Doesn't Get It? I'll have to rip the heart out of the book. I have to talk to my agent or I may just slit my throat. Maybe I can e-mail the Ninklink and ask what my editor means when she says this "distances" the characters? From what? A person of low literary IQ?

Oh, shoot, I forgot about the column. I'm too furious to think straight right now. I'd better answer these e-mails and calm down. And if I go out to lunch with my critique partner, maybe I can brainstorm some way of fixing this @#\$\$% manuscript.

**Day 3:** I've cut a hundred pages out of the manuscript! How will I ever put this mess back together again? Here I am, freaking out, and my editor is asking for the proposal on the historical. I'll have to go online and order some research books.

My e-mailbox is overflowing. There are bound to be some ideas in there on how to get around the plot problem. Wish there were some ideas for the prez column, but I'll think of something. What did other Ninc presidents write about? Maybe I could dig through files and read a few old columns for ideas.

**Day 2:** Maybe I can salvage fifty of these pages from my novel. If I rewrite the opening chapter—again—I might get away with this plot device after all. But I just talked to my brainstorming group, and I have all these great ideas for the proposal. I'd better jot them down before I forget them. Maybe I should run up to the library to request an interlibrary loan on the book bookfinder.com couldn't find. Then I can run over to the airport, pick up tomorrow's luncheon speaker, drop her off at the hotel, and still get back in time to work on the prez column before I read today's e-mail.

No, wait, that won't work. The chapter is having a dinner this evening, and I'm supposed to be there. Okay, scratch the column. I'll work on it tomorrow. I don't have to go to the chapter meeting, do I? I'll just show up for lunch.

**Day 1:** Column is due tomorrow. Maybe I ought to write one on revisions? What can I say that hasn't been said a thousand times: Editors Don't Understand—*my* readers are smart enough to know what I mean.

What if I write about how e-mail takes over our lives? Heck, life is taking over my life. Who has time for e-mail? I need to shower and go to the luncheon. Maybe if lunch is over quickly, I can get back to the column. Or the revisions. Or the proposal. Or the research. If it's too late, I'll just check e-mail.

**Day 0:** Oops, the column should be in *now*. And it's the last column of my year. I haven't written the words that will change the future of the industry forever. Or even the future of Ninc. Could I write about what I've accomplished this year? We've increased the membership a little. Had some fun. Amended the bylaws to move the next conference to spring. Updated the website to include huge amounts of valuable material. Had a world-class newsletter. My hardworking board deserves credit for all that. How about the NYC conference? That was a winner, although I can't claim credit. I have to thank Kate Dooley and Laura Baker and a terrific slate of volunteers for devoting a year of their lives. How about the marvelous new board we have in place to look after the future of Ninc? The members saw to that, bless them.

Hey, everybody, it's been a great year! Thanks for making me look good!

— **Pat Rice**

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**Olivia Rupprecht, who can be reached at  
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## ***Ditching the Book of Your Heart***

**Continued from page 1**



Here's a term I can sink my teeth into, though I contend the article should be changed from "The" to "A." Just so I can keep on writing.

Discovering the nuances of my voice has been a long process, and frankly, I think it's an ongoing adventure. With each book I write, I learn something new. A Book of My Voice allows me to explore the stories that spring from my psyche in their truest form.

My voice may grow and change as I grow and change, but the essential foundation remains the same. My voice is mine and the more I write, the more I reveal of that voice.

I'm not saying there aren't going to be people who will try to alter or squelch my voice. Of course, that happens. But that I can fight because the voice is so intrinsic, while the heart, in my opinion, is fickle. And since we all have different voices—the pressure to evoke deep emotional angst in the pursuit of *The Book of the Heart* is relieved. Write what you

enjoy! Write from that natural part of you that no one else can copy. Yeah, I can do that.

**S**everal editors at NincCon noted that in about half the cases they'd seen, *The Book of the Heart* was dark and depressing. That too many authors are using the "book of the heart" as a catharsis and while sometimes it works as both a healing tool and a means of entertaining readers, most times it does not.

We bury our deepest and blackest moments in our hearts. Our greatest fears; our worst-case scenarios. I'm not saying that we shouldn't tap into these experiences when needed, but sometimes such soul-searching and personal exploration comes out as angst that no one else wants to read.

And I'm not just proselytizing, here. I've written a "book of my heart." I wrote it during a scary, transitional time of my life. The story was great, the characters vivid. I hope to revive the scenario some

day...but without the darkness hovering over the work like a thundercloud. Maybe for some other authors this would work, but since that book, I've discovered my VOICE. And my voice completely contrasts what was in my heart at the time I wrote that book. Shoot, in that one, even the baby died. Yikes!

Which moves me to another point. Some mega-talented authors do not write angst. None. Nada. Not a word. Their voice is fun, sassy, irreverent. They write romantic comedies, light romps, and quick-paced adventures. *The Book of the Heart* somehow seems to never apply to them, because the deep emotional bleeding on the page isn't present.

A Book of the Voice allows all writers to write with the one part of us that is unique to us and only us. It gives us permission to explore what is quirky about our individual outlooks, what is inherent to our personal experiences. Talk about fresh and bold. A Book of the Voice. What a great term!

**NINK**

# Handling the Negative

*(from the editor) If year-end means a time for taking stock and looking at fresh approaches, aka the dreaded “resolutions,” Pat McLaughlin gives us these further ideas on practical approaches to “Handling the Negative” as a follow-up to her June NINK article on “Negativity and Self-Doubt.”*

The idea of positive psychology is not to ignore that bad things happen. Instead, it's based on that old saying your mother probably told you: It's not what happens to you, it's how you handle it. So, how do we improve at handling the bad things in our lives?

## THOUGHT EXPRESS-LANES

Scientists have proven that a repeated thought stimulates dendritic growth in the brain, so in essence the biological/chemical connections that create a thought become faster the more you have that thought—good or bad.

While new thoughts must take the time to build each connection, the same old thought clicks through in the express lane rut it's already built.

Are affirmations the answer to making thought express-lanes work for us?

University of Pennsylvania psychology professor Martin E.P. Seligman, who is one of the leaders of Positive Psychology, is not an affirmation fan.

He writes in *Learned Optimism* that the skills of optimism “do not consist in learning to say positive things to yourself. We have found over the years that positive statements you make to yourself have little if any effect. What *is* crucial is ... the power of ‘non-negative thinking.’ Changing the destructive things you say to yourself when you experience the setbacks” of life.

So, more important than affirmations could be the flip side—that by tuning into the negative ruts and saying STOP IT! you could shut down that express lane to negativity. (There's a “Mad TV” skit with Bob

Newhart as a therapist who, when his patient says she's afraid of being buried alive, yells “STOP IT! Have you ever been buried alive? Do you know anyone who's been buried alive? Then stop worrying about it. Just STOP IT!” It actually works.)

Some people know this intuitively. That hit me during a Ninclink discussion about checking Amazon for your book's ranking and reviews.

Elizabeth Doyle Fowler wrote, “One time, I was checking Amazon to see whether anyone had written anything nice or nasty about me, and my husband came up behind me, put his hand over the computer screen, and said, ‘Why don't you go write another book instead?’ I have to say that for me, that turned out to be good advice.

“I can't speak for other people, but for me, worrying about it just wasn't helping me become a better writer, I don't think. And that's what I want to do—become a better writer... .

“...We could form a 12-step program? Amazon-Anonymous? ‘My name is Elizabeth and I haven't checked for 120 days ...’”

Okay, Elizabeth and her husband were way ahead of me and without needing research to sway her.

## SUPPRESSING NEGATIVE AREAS OF OUR BRAIN

*Recommendations (below) by Barbara Fredrickson of the University of Michigan from her 2000 article “Cultivating Positive Emotions to Optimize Health and Well-Being” should serve this purpose as well, but I'm holding out for chocolate.*

## EXPLANATORY STYLES

Being aware of the three Ps (*permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization*) can certainly help. However, Seligman doesn't stop there. Based on psychologist Albert Ellis's ABC schema, Seligman presents an ABCDE approach:

**Adversity:** Work at being objective about the “bad thing” that sets off a negative response.

**Belief:** This is your interpretation of the adversity, your evaluation, and your inference. These are thoughts, and their accuracy can be checked.

**Consequences:** These are your feelings—the consequences of your beliefs about the adversity.

Say Artemis Author has a book proposal rejected—that's adversity. Artemis's belief is that he'll never sell again, he's all washed up. The consequences are that he feels defeated, which is unlikely to be conducive to writing a new proposal that might sell.

So, there's the problem, now what's the next step?

**Disputation:** If you ever said to yourself “get a grip,” you were most likely disputing your B after an A, which should change your C—that's the goal. Another “D” can help with this: Distancing. Listen to the statements coming from inside your head under B and then imagine if someone else yelled them at you. Would you believe them? Would you slug the person saying them? Then maybe they don't belong in your head, either.

Seligman emphasized that your disputations must be believable. Mouthing unbelievable reassurances won't work. He says believability is based on four elements: evidence, alternatives, implications and usefulness.

*Evidence* is self-explanatory. If Artemis Author has a multi-book contract with a publisher other than the one who rejected his proposal, evidence is pretty darn strong to dispute his *I'm all washed up* lament.

*Alternatives* refers to explanations for the adversity other than your Belief. Artemis's might include that the publisher already had a book similar to his proposal in production, that the editor had a bad day, that this wasn't a good fit with that publishing

program, that the editor has a screw loose.

*Implications*, in my mind is worst-case scenario. If your belief is correct, what then? Artemis looks at his life if he never sells again. Is that the end of his life? Will he starve? Will his family leave him? Will his mother disown him?

*Usefulness* means, as Seligman writes, that the consequences of a belief are more important than whether it's true. In Artemis's case, the consequence of believing he would never sell again could be freezing up and not being able to write—the old self-fulfilling fear. Artemis's belief is *not* useful.

After all that disputing, you should be ready for E—

**Energization.** Disputing should at least be putting a dent in those beliefs that followed after the adversity. Changing the beliefs should also change the consequences. Artemis's disputations have taken hold, especially the one about the rejected proposal not being a good fit with the publisher, and now he is feeling determined ... and energized enough to send the proposal to a more suitable publisher.

This process has brought Artemis from the pessimistic side to the optimistic side of the three Ps.

"Increased optimism, however attained, should translate into an increased ability to find positive meaning and experience positive emotions in daily life," writes Fredrickson. "Experiences of positive emotions, in turn, should broaden habitual modes of thinking and build personal resources for coping with life's adversity."

## **VANQUISHING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS WITH POSITIVE EMOTIONS**

Courting positive emotions to fight negativity works because, Fredrickson says, "A person's thought-action repertoire cannot be simultaneously broad and narrow." Fredrickson offers several strategies to court positive emotions:

Relaxation therapies (meditation,

yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, and biofeedback) which Fredrickson also calls contentment therapies. Contentment, as a positive emotion, can undo the negative and broaden the thought processes.

Behavioral therapies aimed at increasing rates of pleasant activities. Studies have shown decreased levels of depression and even the apparent prevention of symptoms of depression. Pleasant activities produce positive emotions best when the individual feels s/he has control of the activity and if they share it with others. Cognitive therapies aimed at teaching optimistic explanatory styles, such as Seligman's to avoid depression.

But beyond that absence of a negative (depression), the goal is to bring the positive that Fredrickson and others hold provides physiological benefits (heart, immune system) and psychological benefits (resiliency, flexible thinking). That brings us to her final strategy: Coping strategies that find "positive meaning within and despite adversity."

Spiritual and religious beliefs are perhaps the most obvious way, but there are others. "(a) Reframing adverse events in a positive light (also called positive reappraisal); (b) infusing ordinary events with positive value; and (c) pursuing and attaining realistic goals." She cites studies that indicate "finding positive meaning outperforms engaging in pleasant activities as a predictor of depression remission and future psychological well-being."

Why would that be so? I would summarize the reasons by saying that finding positive meaning produces stronger positive emotions than do pleasant activities.

And here's an answer to a question that had been rolling around in my head from Susan Folkman, a Professor of Medicine at the University of California—San Francisco by way of Fredrickson quoting her: "Importantly, it appears that positive emotions 'may not need to be either intense or prolonged to produce a beneficial effect.' (Folkman, 1997, p. 1218)."

A fleeting or solitary instance of a positive emotion is not going to turn depression around on a dime. But multiple moments build on each other—remember the express lane for thoughts? It all seems to fit, doesn't it?

Finally, if you need more reason to try to change, findings were published in the February 2000 issue of the journal *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* that the difference between a moderately optimistic and a moderately pessimistic person amounted to about 12 years more of living for the optimist.

— **Pat McLaughlin**

## *Bits'n'Pieces*

### **A LITTLE SOMETHING NEW IN OUR MARKETS FOR 2003...**

**H/S: Red Dress Ink** is expanding its titles from 1-2 a month to 2-3 a month in 2003. All ages are permitted (these books no longer need to be simply 20- or 30-something heroines but can have 40- or 50-something heroines and possibly older); the heroines are "young at heart." The books no longer need to be simply romantic comedy, but can be cool and cutting edge. New guidelines are available.

**Love Inspired/Steeple Hill:** In 2003 Steeple Hill will launch an as yet untitled Women's Fiction Line (à la MIRA). The orientation does NOT necessarily have to have a Christian inspirational slant only, though *inspirational* is still key. Contact Tracey Farrell, Senior Editor and Editorial Coordinator for further information.

**"Bits" Compiled by Terey daly Ramin**

# Tricks of the Trade

## If I'd Only Known Then What I Know Now

Remember the movie *Groundhog Day* that came out about ten years ago? In the film Bill Murray keeps living the same day over and over, making the same mistakes until the end, when he finally has an epiphany. Ever feel your writing career's a bit like that?

The point, I guess, is that time and experience are great teachers. Sure, some of us are quicker studies than others but just about everybody can look back and say, "If I'd only known..." or "If I had it to do all over again..."

This month we'll share some of what we've learned over the years. The comments submitted seem to fall into two broad categories: second thoughts about career strategy and insights about the craft of writing. First let's see how Nincoids would have handled their careers differently.

### Career Decisions

It seems at the outset many, if not most, writers didn't fully appreciate just how difficult it is to maintain a successful writing career. **Lynn Miller** made the mistake of trying to start a new business and become a novelist at the same time. Lynn learned that "something's got to give in this situation" and that "generally, it's you and what you are doing publishing-wise. However the good thing I learned," she goes on to say, "is it's possible to eventually start making progress and survive." The key, Lynn suggests, is the "priority choices" one makes. As in everything connected with the writing life, "the important thing is picking yourself up and moving forward."

*What* to write seems to have been a career problem for many Nincoids. **Cheryl Zack** says that if she had it to do over again she'd "stay closer to the type of books I originally wanted to write. Although," she adds, "I admit that by wandering through several different genres, I learned new writing skills."

Similarly, **Sherry-Anne Jacobs** says that given a second chance to start over, "I wouldn't try to take off as a historical writer and a SF/F writer at the same time....I think you need to focus really tightly on your area of writing to establish your name—then you can branch out." In the same

vein, **Robin Bayne** wishes that at the outset she'd "been certain which genre I wanted to be published in before investing too much time....By writing in a variety of subgenres before deciding where I belonged, I also had less chance to build a readership."

**Tracy Grant** wishes that she'd worked up the courage sooner to, as she puts it, "write the book I wanted to write." When she did take the risk to write the book of her heart "without a contract," Tracy says, "I ended up moving my career along much more than I did by playing it safe and trying to write what I thought I needed to write to fit within a genre (which I wasn't very good at)."

Interestingly, experience doesn't always teach the same lesson. If **Carole Bellacera** had it to do over again she would have followed the course almost every other writer of women's fiction does. "I would've published in category romance," Carole says, "and built a readership before 'breaking out' into women's fiction. Unfortunately, I was stubborn, wanting to write what I wanted to write—big books.... Even though I finally sold my first book in hardcover, it's been tough building a readership that way."

Contrast Carole's view with **Julia Ross** who says "I've always wished I'd had the courage to start with a 'big book' first, instead of messing about with six Regencies before moving to historicals and now into trade paperback." Julia goes on to explain, "It's always seemed to me that there's only that one chance to have a big launch as a first-time author." Julia also regrets she didn't know more about the writing process in order to better control things like pen names. Because of erroneous assumptions, she says, "I've published ten novels under three different versions of my name—causing great confusion to all concerned."

Over the years I've heard complaints from many writers who felt they were taken advantage of by publishers when they were new at the game. One Nincoid who requested anonymity said, "I lost an enormous amount of money by not having hired an agent when I signed my first several contracts with [my publisher]....I was given a royalty rate way below the norm and the conscienceless bastards had the nerve to warn me not to discuss my contracts with other writers. The accompanying smirk was to convey the impression that my contracts were better than other writers were getting when nothing could have been further from the truth." **Victoria Thompson** certainly agrees that an agent is important. Says Vicki, "I wish I'd known that everything is negotiable and that an agent can earn her 15% by simply negotiating that royalty rate up a percent or two!"

If she had it to do over again, **Annette Mahon** says “I think I would not use my legal name....I have not had a problem personally, but I’ve heard some very weird stories over the years. Makes you think using a pseudonym might be a good idea.” Had she been given a do-over **Kelly McClymer** says “I would have tried to do no more than one book a year.” She adds, “I ended up nearly burning out because family crises came out of the woodwork as soon as I signed on the dotted line.”

Mystery publishers are notorious for offering little support in the way of promotion for new authors. After selling her first book **Deni Dietz** assumed the publisher would do everything possible to make it a success, “maybe even rise to the top of the best-seller list. So,” Deni continues, “in all innocence, I asked my first editor how one gets a second press run. He replied: ‘Mortgage your house and promote like hell.’” Adds Deni, “Now I wish I had.”

**Barbara Bretton** recalls being “overwhelmed by that first sale.” She continues, “I wish to God I hadn’t felt so damn grateful. That attitude colored many of my decisions for longer than I care to admit.” Barbara has a list of regrets: “That I didn’t push harder in the beginning when the romance industry was riding high. That I ever let myself be twisted into knots by reviewers. That I didn’t have the guts to make a change of publisher sooner. That the doubts and fears only seem to grow louder with the years. I’m glad I didn’t know that when I started.” Barbara’s last comment is a good segue into our other category, i.e. what we wish we’d known about the writing process.

## Craft of Writing

**Ann Roth** expresses a sentiment I share: “...if I’d known how difficult the writing and publishing process is, I might not have tried to write in the first place.” Fortunately, though, we were all naive and optimistic. Looking back twenty years, I personally can’t imagine having done anything else. As Ann says, “I’d have written anyway, simply because of all those stories inside my head.”

But if she had it to do over again Ann would have “quit taking the advice of others as gospel...[and] learned to follow my own instincts.” She also says she would “allow my voice and style out of the closet a whole lot sooner, [having] wasted several years editing out my voice—again to please critique partners.” Ann sums up the lessons of experience thus: “I wish I’d trusted myself more from the start.”

Like Ann, **Sherry-Anne Jacobs** wishes she’d known “how complex a craft it is and how long it takes to pull it all together.” Sherry-Anne learned from experience, as she puts it, “how much revision I need as a writer.” The other lesson she learned is “that it’s better to let your first novel mature in the cupboard and go on to write two or three others, then polish/re-polish the early ones before submitting them.”

**Lynn Miller** recalls writing her first story and experiencing “a wonderment that comes from losing yourself in the world you’re creating.” She adds that once she was pub-

lished it was harder to lose herself in the work, perhaps because of the expectations of others. **Pat Roy** wished she’d started writing in her twenties. Because her writing got relegated to “snatches here and there—half-baked characters, partially finished stories,” etc. she says, “as a result I have poor writing habits and dwindling years to get all I want done...Wish I’d been more serious sooner.” **Pat Nagle**, the author of historical fiction, says of writing her first novel, “I did not keep track of the sources where I found historical details....Since the first book I have kept track of this information, never wanting to have to retrace my research steps again.”

**Gaelen Foley** regrets she didn’t know about Syd Field’s book on screenwriting to help her “figure out what the heck was meant by ‘structure’...” Gaelen also wishes “that someone would have told me to write my manuscripts all the way through to the end before going back to revise.” **Jodie Larsen Nida** agrees with Gaelen. Jodie says the best advice she ever had was “Only revise what you wrote yesterday.” **Dennis Foley** agrees as well, quoting John Steinbeck: “Abandon the idea that you are ever going to finish. Write just one page for each day. Never correct or rewrite until the whole thing is down.”

*Note: We’ll have to do a column on this sometime. My practice is just the opposite. Unless I have all previous scenes and chapters consistent with later changes of plot, storyline, character traits and character development, I can’t proceed. I don’t polish until the end, but I must revise as I go, even if it means mid-book rewrites. (Considering Steinbeck’s level of achievement and mine, perhaps there’s a point to be learned here.) R.K.*

Here’s what **Lillian Stewart Carl** wishes she’d known when she sat down to write her first novel: “1) Never take anything for granted—not your editor, not your publisher, not your own abilities and/or preconceptions; 2) You have to know when to hold ’em, and know when to fold ’em.”

Let’s wrap this up with an astute philosophical observation on the nature of the writing game from **Victoria Thompson**. Says Vicki, “I wish I’d known that there would be ups and downs in my writing career. I probably wouldn’t have believed it then, but at least if I’d been warned, it might not have come as such a shock....Most [writers I know] have either been dropped by a publisher, fired an agent, been dropped by an agent, gone to another publisher who promised the moon and delivered green cheese, been ‘homeless’ for a period of time (as in no publishing house), tried a breakout book and failed, tried a breakout book and succeeded but were still counted a failure for some stupid reason, got a bad cover that ruined their careers, or all of the above.

“As they say, Shit Happens. To everyone. Don’t take it personally. And remember, if your ship comes in and you miss it, there’ll be another one along, but you’ve got to be waiting on the dock or you’ll miss that one, too. The only guarantee in this business is that if you give up, you’ll fail.”

Amen.

# **The Buzz in the Biz.....by Olivia Rupprecht**

## **Screenwriting Part 2**

**NINK:** *At the Vancouver conference, a successful screenwriter told us that most studios want to bring in their own screenwriters for a project rather than have a novelist do a treatment for their own book. True?*

KM: That is true. It's also rare for a novelist to pitch their own book to a studio. The overture usually comes from the publisher or from an agent.

**NINK:** *Publishers can be very arbitrary in what they select to promote or not, and a lot of authors' agents don't necessarily have good Hollywood contacts. What then?*

KM: You could try to get a Hollywood agent to represent your work, but most don't know what to do with anything that's not a script.

KFY: That's true for the most part, but there are some agents and managers who are specializing in taking books and feeding them into the Hollywood market. A friend of mine, Natalie Rosenberg, does something along these lines. She'll read a book or a script and put together her own coverage in a publication, which goes out to about 150 different agencies, production companies, and other people at the studios. It's not a mass distribution, but it reaches people she has contacts with that she feels will be open to looking at these properties. She has had some sales, some success with this. So if it's up to the author to figure out ways to promote themselves, this might be one of those ways.

**NINK:** *Any other suggestions?*

KFY: The Hollywood Creative Directory Producers List and the Hollywood Creative Directory Agents and Managers Directory are really, really helpful. They list names and credits, addresses, phone numbers, e-mails, everything you need to know about the people who run the industry. To subscribe you can go to [www.hcdonline.com](http://www.hcdonline.com)

KM: And once you target who would be the best person or production company for your story, it's probably better to approach someone who's hungry to prove themselves, like an assistant or junior executive/director of development.

**NINK:** *Piece of cake, oh yeah.*

KM: We're so inundated with submissions, and there's always the possibility of getting sued—even with total flops someone will come in and say, hey, they stole my idea!—that we have to make it very difficult for just anyone to get their material to us. Believe me, we get calls from all over the world. We get calls from 90-year-old women, little kids, there's a guy from Greece who would call and leave mes-

sages saying, "I'm not a terrorist!" People send photos of their dogs dressed up—

KFY: Especially poodles.

KM: Guys from prison...

**NINK:** *Prison letters, now there's something we could discuss for awhile. But let's backtrack to the fact that studios like to pick and choose who does their screenwriting. What if a novelist aspired to be a screenwriter? Are they almost better off going incognito, such as when they change genres and take a pseudonym to create a new identity?*

KM: Being a published novelist is saying something—that's quite a credential, so no, it's nothing to hide. But I do think there's a tendency to pigeonhole people, it happens to screenwriters all the time.

KFY: I know of several female writers trying to break into the action genre, who use their initials so opinions aren't biased. In fact, I did try to help one because I knew who it really was, basically disregarded that fact, liked what I read, gave it a push and Island did option it. Unfortunately, I left Island six months later and the new regime wasn't as excited about the project, so it was never made.

KM: But as far as a novelist taking a pen name to do a script, I don't believe that's necessary, it might even be intriguing that "oh, novelist so-and-so has done a script," and we'll be curious to take a look. But the truth is, when you open the page, it doesn't really matter who wrote it. What matters is the quality of the material itself, if it speaks to you, throws a hook, and pulls you in. Is it a page-turner? Is it magic?

**NINK:** *And what about you, Kathie? What do you look for in a submission?*

KFY: I look for two things: First, is this a project we want to do, that's appropriate for the studio I'm working for—and that will fluctuate because the variables are very different for cable as opposed to animation or feature films. The second thing I'm looking for, that's even more important, is whether or not this is a writer I'd be interested in working with again. Say I receive a script that's beautifully written, but I have something already in the works that's very similar or it's just not quite right for this studio, but the writing is so beautiful that I'll put them on my writer's list. We all have these wonderful little lists with genres, whether it's romance or comedy or thrillers, and that list is what we'll go to if we need something re-written. Or, if we want to develop something that writer excels in, we'll go to their agent and ask if that writer has something else we can use. It's the talent we're looking for, even if an initial submission doesn't work for some reason.

**NINK:** *Is there anything the two of you are specifically looking for right now?*



KM: We're always wanting comedies. But comedies are so difficult to get right. Sometimes writers have funny ideas but the dialog isn't funny, or they do great dialog but can't put a story together. And it's so subjective—what I find funny, maybe my boss can't stand. Besides comedies, what's been big lately is a lot of family-type entertainment, something that will appeal not only to kids but will cross over and appeal to their parents, like *Spy Kids* last year... Period pieces are hard to do; given its scope, cost and relevance, the combination of that makes them difficult... There are different schools of thought about politics. Would a particular movie get made? Maybe not if Tom Hanks didn't do it. When you're making a movie, the script is a big thing, but it's not the only thing. There are so many elements that have to come together for it all to work.

KFY: And once a certain type of show or movie does come together, watch out for overkill. It's hard to predict the end of cycles but it takes two years usually for something to come out, so if you're looking at what's popular now in a movie, forget it, because it's already out of date.

KM: Like *The Blair Witch Project*, and then you had all these wanna-be Blair Witches come out. Oh, and *Bridget Jones*. After the novel came out, EVERYBODY was like, oh let's do Bridget Jones this or Bridget Jones that. Just fill in the blank. Male Bridget Jones, Married Bridget Jones—

KFY: Gay Bridget Jones!

**NINK:** *(laughing)* Kathie, are they looking for anything in particular in your division at Paramount TV?

KFY: First of all, it's helpful for a writer to understand the hierarchy of a studio's structure—who owns what. Paramount is owned by Viacom. Under the Viacom banner is CBS. So it's a natural thing to synergistically consider what might work under that umbrella, and how to diversify—which is why we're also doing some things with cable.

**NINK:** *Such as?*

KFY: For awhile we did a lot with Showtime—probably a third of their original programming came from Paramount—but now we're looking at a broader spectrum and doing quite a bit with Lifetime, and other cable options. What I find really interesting is that executives used to think, well, if this won't work for the movies, then I'll send it over to the TV area—irregardless of the fact the budget was ridiculously high or whatever. A lot of that thinking has changed. We are now getting more material that's of higher quality because they've noticed that places like Showtime and HBO are asking for it. A lot of directors and some stars want to do projects that are meaningful to them, or they want to experiment and try something different. We actually have projects that involve people like Oliver Stone, Spike Jones, Spike Lee.

**NINK:** *HBO puts out a lot of quality shows that would be tough to do on the big screen.*

KFY: Yes, and a good example of that is a trilogy about abortion, called *If These Walls Could Talk*. It has top name stars like Sissy Spacek, Cher, Demi Moore—and they're

appearing in a movie that cost approximately \$3 million total to make. I mean, these are people, if you had them in a feature, you're talking about \$10 to \$15 million per salary right there! But because they cared enough about the subject matter and the story being told within it, they wanted to do it. And you'll find more and more directors and actors are starting to think this way. We want projects that *mean* something—that's what I'm hearing on my end. So we're looking for things with substance, usually dramatic substance. Not to say we're not looking for comedies, too!

**NINK:** *Both of you are still so enthusiastic about what you do, I can't help but wonder how you've stayed that way after so many years in an industry that could leave a lot of people jaded.*

KM: Besides having a great support system with family and friends like Kathie, I think a lot of it is about finding your niche. Doing what you're happy in and evaluating your motivations. I love both the creative and administrative ends, dealing with finance and marketing. And I'm doing what I love to do.

KFY: Just as I left the executive ranks because it didn't make me happy. Story analysis and working with writers on their scripts as a consultant is what I find rewarding about my post-exec career. I took a big cut in pay and position to do what meant the most to me. Was it worth it? Oh, yes.

KM: Yes, you have to find your perspective. You have to ask yourself, at what cost am I willing to succeed? What am I willing to pay—or not—to reach this goal?

KFY: What is it that makes you wake up in the morning and feel that your work, your life, is worthwhile?

KM: That's something we should all ask ourselves...

KFY: Because the answer holds the key to much of our happiness.

KM: And happiness, when you get down to it, is a good way to measure our success.

**NINK**

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## **INTRODUCING.....**

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*The following authors have applied for membership in Ninc and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of Ninc:*

### **New Applicants:**

Carla Daum (C.J. Carmichael), Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
Dar Tomlinson, Scottsdale AZ

### **New Members:**

Stephanie Doyle, Marlton NJ

**Ninc has room to grow...recommend membership to your colleagues. Prospective members may apply online at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com).**

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# Bits'n'Pieces

**BERTELSMANN PURCHASES MORE BN. COM SHARES...**What does this mean?

Hmmm. You choose. In the wake of the announcement that Barnes & Noble Inc. would buy up to \$10 million worth of (low-priced) stock in BN.com, their partners at Bertelsmann indicated that company too would “spend low single digit million dollars” on shares in the Internet bookseller.

— TdR



## Sticky Notes from the Edge

### *Synesthesia Does It....*

*The two newspaper articles were on the same page, and I honestly can't say which one I found more compelling.*

The first one was about a phenomenon called synesthesia, the blending and overlapping of the five senses. Apparently this occurrence is seven times more common in artists, musicians, and writers than it is in the normal (read: boring) population. Some people see auras around others, or experience smells when exposed to shapes, and hear sounds inside tastes. Artists ascribe tastes to colors (the theory being they eat those big tubes of paint). Musicians experience the scale as a series of pulsing dots (they drink too much). And writers experience words in tastes and colors (my dad, though not a writer, could cuss a blue streak).

On a more personal note, and when only a small child, I said words that ended up tasting like soap... but only if my mother was in the vicinity or my brother told on me. I don't know how to account for that.

I myself have known writers who have eaten entire tubes of paint and drunken too much. In fact, they're seven times more likely to do that, according to this article, when a royalty statement arrives. And all of this leads to the obvious conclusion that synesthetes experience the world more intensely. In fact, the effect of the experience was described as superficially resembling a drug-induced hallucination, more commonly known as “the 70s.”

And apparently, boys and girls, we are not the only ones on drugs. The researchers are, as well. That

was why this one guy said his name was “Vilayanur Ramachandran.” Who is he trying to kid? Clearly, everyone will remember that as the title of a song by Boy George. And Mr. Rama-lama-ding-dong used words like “fusiform gyrus.” Ha, ha, ha! Like those are real words!

You want more? Some lady psychologist said synesthetes report intense pleasure when performing simple tasks. I was with her so far, but then she gave as an example balancing our checkbooks. Has that ever happened to you? I believe that would only happen if I could have access to Bill Gates' checkbook. Talk about intense pleasure! Wow!

Oh, yeah, the other article on that page. This one related medical research conducted on customers at The Home Depot or the Craftsman section of a Sears store. Apparently it has been proven scientifically that duct tape can remove warts. I swear I don't even know where to go with that one. I was like: what? Duct tape? Sure, my dad felt certain he could fix that pesky San Andreas slip fault out in California with a few big rolls of the all-purpose stuff. But...warts?

*Apparently the tape irritates the wart. I can see how it could. The poor wart was also scrubbed with a pumice stone or emery board between bouts of being taped over. How would a synesthete experience that, you have to ask?*

Footnote: Red tastes like cherries. But avoid the browns. Trust me.

— Cheryl Anne Porter

# OUTSIDE THE BIG APPLE

Psst. Got a script?

From what I've learned while writing two screenplays, I've concluded there are more screenwriters than novelists "out there." I hope most of them are as clueless as I am when it comes to getting these scripts into the right hands because if I'm in the minority, I'm really in trouble. Yes, I could turn this latest screenplay over to my agent as I did the first one, but her contact in the film industry has changed alliances/affiliations more times than I can keep track of, and I have the sneaky suspicion my original screenplay hasn't survived all those moves.

Fine. Time for me to take control, but how?

As someone who only rudimentarily understands how Hollywood works, getting in touch with the movers and shakers without a script agent seemed like an effort in futility, especially since I don't live in Southern California. After losing my "frickin'" mind wading through the multitude of screenwriting "contests," many of which I suspect are nothing more than money-makers for those who run them, I decided not to go that route—not at \$40-\$50 a pop.

Instead, I've cast my lot with [www.writerscriptnetwork.com](http://www.writerscriptnetwork.com). Yes, I'm out \$80, but I've been getting their newsletter for over a year so have a pretty good idea what they're about and like what I see. Also, a talented, intelligent, beautiful young lady (hard not to hate her) of my acquaintance recently made a valuable contact via them.

So what is [writerscriptnetwork](http://writerscriptnetwork.com) about? Think of it as a meeting ground for writers and what are known as industry pros—directors, producers, etc. From the writer's standpoint, what happens is that he/she posts the logline, synopsis, and screenplay online (\$40) where it's then available for said industry pros to peruse. The other \$40 I spent went into including my logline in an issue of the *Players Marketplace*, a printed magazine that's snail-mailed to nearly 5,000 industry professionals.

When I first stumbled upon [writerscriptnetwork](http://writerscriptnetwork.com), my skepticism was high, but by gosh, I believe it's working. As of early November, 119 writers had either gained writing work or sold/optioned their scripts. In addition more than 66 writers have gained representation and 26 shorts have been sold or optioned. Currently, they average three scripts sold/optioned or a deal made each week.

A free weekly newsletter provides an average of one producer looking for scripts, etc with each issue. The issue I just received announced that Cosgrove/Meurer Productions (producers of *Unsolved Mysteries* and several movies-for-television with budgets of up to \$5 mil) was looking for scripts of true contemporary stories or holiday TV movies. The usual process is for writers to email these producers a logline and see what develops. I've done so a couple of times, and although so far lightning hasn't struck, it sure as heck won't if I don't reach out. There's also a for-pay Pre-

ferred Newsletter that promises at least four weekly leads. I haven't forked over for that, yet.

Earlier I mentioned an intelligent, beautiful young woman who has taken a giant step up the industry ladder. Granted, Megan is a graduate of the L.A. Film School and has worked on several animal documentaries, but most recently her own creative work has taken her in a different direction. Paulo Feliciano of Azores (a small production company) read online some of what Megan wrote and "based on her passion for the locale, he has decided to work with her on an idea he has for a film. At this point, the script will be written on spec." Feliciano's company does documentaries, commercials, corporate videos, digital cinema, etc., and is a member of the Society of Professional Journalists which just goes to show the vast variety of companies involved in cinema.

When I first made the decision to register my screenplay online, I found the directions confusing, but I slowly worked my way through the steps and discovered that despite the verbiage in the directions, the "doing it" wasn't that hard. The first step is to register the script via The Authors Guild, which serves to protect the work and supplies the equivalent of a copyright. I did that online for a minimal amount. Maybe an A-list producer will jump at my screenplay; maybe it won't happen. But my work is "out there" and in the five days it has been online, the logline has been looked at no less than a dozen times.

Hope springs eternal.

— **By Vella Munn**

## Bits'n'Pieces

### OVER 15 MILLION HARD-TO-FIND BOOKS IN THE OFFING...

Last month Alibris and Borders announced an agreement to bring customers access to over 15 million hard-to-find books via Title Sleuth, the self-service computer stations located in Borders stores. With the enhanced self-service capability, customers can search for out-of-print, used, and collectible titles and either order directly from the computer screen or have a bookseller order it for them at the information desk. The same e-mail or phone notification system used now will notify customers of the order's arrival. So we'll let you know when B&N implements a similar system.

— **TdR**

# Online.....by Lorraine Heath

2002 is coming to a close, and it seems like a good time to remind members how to take advantage of the many Online benefits associated with Novelists, Inc.

Visit the *Novelists, Inc. website*, <http://www.ninc.com>, to discover the wonderful sources of information that the organization has made available online. Various articles and columns are archived.

Pick up the *Novelists, Inc. logo*, <http://www.ninc.com/authors.asp>, and place it on your website to help promote this valuable writers' organization.

Visit the *Links to Ninc Authors* page. If you are not listed, send your URL to [newlinks@ninc.com](mailto:newlinks@ninc.com). Include your name as it appears on the roster because membership is verified before links are posted. If you are listed, verify that your URL is correct. Report any changes to your URL by sending an e-mail to [linkchange@ninc.com](mailto:linkchange@ninc.com).

Promote your upcoming releases through *NEXTPAGE*, <http://www.ninc.com/nextpg.asp>. Send your name and pseudonym (if applicable), title, publisher, and ISBN number, if known, to Neff Rotter ([neff@belgravehouse.com](mailto:neff@belgravehouse.com)). "Since I put up three months at a time (past, present, and coming), people should send me their titles two months in advance of publication if they want them listed all three times. On the other hand, I'm perfectly happy for people to send me their whole year's worth of books at any time and I'll put them up when the time comes."

Register for a "Members Only Password" so you can access the Agent Guide, the Research/Resource Links, members' e-mail addresses, the Dues Renewal statement (Remember: Dues are due by January 15, 2003), and other "Members Only" perks.

To network with members online, subscribe to *NINCLINK*, [NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoo.com).

## PROMOTION

I'm always searching for ways to promote my work that doesn't cost me anything but time. I've found Curiosity Corner offered by *New And Previously Owned Books*, <http://www.newandusedbooks.com>, to be a fun way to go. Vickie Denney says that Curiosity Corner "is one of the most popular features in both our newsletter and on our website, and we're very excited about having new authors participate in our ongoing effort to make it even better.

"Basically, we're striving to offer interesting and entertaining information to our readers about some of the little-known topics they come across while reading romance novels. For instance, one Curiosity Corner article explained what the various types of carriages used during the Regency were. Another covered modern-day police interviewing techniques. We're open to all eras, historical and con-

temporary, and all sorts of topics, from manners, dress, codes of honor, gone but not forgotten structures (castles, keeps, strong holds, religious sites), women in business (in a man's world), unusual careers, etc. You can expound on the historical importance of a certain invention or event, tell readers about a particular garment (corsets, pantaloons, surcoat, etc.) or accessory, (shoes, hats, hatpins, gloves, fans, etc.) or explain how certain crimes have been or are solved. Modes of travel and cooking would be equally great, as would historical money usage, bathing habits, medicines, and beauty treatments. For those who write paranormals, futuristic, etc., topics might include folklore, talismans, and witchcraft.

"These are just a few ideas, but we're willing to consider any thoughts you might have, and will be happy to help brainstorm a topic, as well.

"We'd like the articles to not only be interesting but written in an entertaining style. A light touch with a little humor seems to have the widest appeal among our readers. Word count should be about 600 words. The entire article will be published on the website, and a "teaser" in the form of the first few lines or paragraphs will be featured in the newsletter, along with a link to the complete article on NPOB.

"The article will have your byline and will note some of your latest books with release dates. If you'd like to do additional promotion on NPOB, such as a contest, mention of that will also be made. However, we would ask that no personal promotion be done in the actual article, and that the focus be kept on the topic itself. If you do have an example from one of your books regarding the topic, (like a scene where a certain accessory or garment is used), a 'brief' one- to three-line mention of that as an illustration would be fine."

To schedule an article to appear in Curiosity Corner, authors should query two months ahead of time, keeping in mind only one article appears per month. Vickie wants "to approve the topic and make sure it is one that fits the guidelines. When I can I prefer the article to run when an author has a new book coming out, running it the month before or just after so they get a little extra publicity..."

## RESEARCH

*Pages of Time*, <http://www.pagesoftime.com>, offers kardlets and bookmarks for individual years beginning with 1900. The bookmark lists average income, average cost of a house, car, loaf of bread, gallon of gas, and gallon of milk. The kardlet offers more. "Each Kardlet contains over 20 pages of news headlines, famous birthdays, price indexes, movies, calendars, sports milestones, advertisements, and other items of interest for the year of your choice." It

might prove a useful tool or at least a starting point if your story takes place in a previous year. I found it helpful when I wrote a present-day story but my characters had met nine years earlier. What were they watching on television, listening to on the radio, and going to see at the movies? Although I was around nine years ago, I wasn't taking notes then. Should have been.

Sabrina Jeffries "stumbled across this cool new site called, *Ask a Librarian—your electronic reference service*, <http://www.ask-a-librarian.org.uk>. They have rules about what you can ask (no homework questions, for example), but for asking specific information about specific things, it looks to be excellent."

## FOR FUN

I enjoy writing when it's raining so I really appreciated Cynthia Pratt sharing <http://www.ferryhalim.com/orisinal/others/rain.htm> with me this month. She described it as "a soothing site for frazzled writer nerves." Indeed it is.

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If you discover sites that you think would interest Novelists, Inc. members, I'd appreciate it if you'd e-mail them to me. I'm always looking for interesting and useful sites to include in the column. E-mail me at [lorraine-heath@attbi.com](mailto:lorraine-heath@attbi.com). Thanks!

## Bits 'n' Pieces

**GENESIS PRESS...**Senior editor and Associate Publisher for Genesis Press is very much in search of submissions to all lines (Indigo, Love Spectrum, and Brown Sugar) but is particularly interested in Asian and Hispanic romances for the Love Spectrum line as she hasn't seen ANY. Genesis publishes at least one and would prefer to guarantee more books in each line every month. They are especially seeking Hispanic and Asian romances at this time. The Brown Sugar (erotica) imprint outsells all other lines hands down and includes African American as well as multiethnic erotica. The Love Spectrum line now includes the former Red Slipper (Asian) and Hispanic lines. Nyani loves e-mail queries and is NOT looking for "one of's. Expect a big announcement regarding Historical romances and other things from Genesis immediately after the first of the year, and a follow-up feature here in *NINK*. Nyani Colom, Associate Publisher, Genesis Press, Inc., 315 Third Avenue North, Columbus MS 39701; Phone: 662-329-9927; Fax: 662-329-9399; e-mail: [Ncolom@genesis-press.com](mailto:Ncolom@genesis-press.com)

**FORBES HITS, DISSES, AND MISSES ON CHICK LIT...**In an October 24th article titled

"Hungry Heart," writer Lea Goldman opened with the cliched (but apparently requisite in some circles) notion that Harlequin fiction equals trash romance, proceeded to follow up with numbers and stats from HQ (presumably accurate), and went on to mention authors (most of them *NINK* members) she spoke with for the article then failed to accurately quote. This aside, it was an interesting feature about HQ's efforts to grow up and meet the needs of a new market and turned into an entertaining article—particularly when Goldman noted that Nora Roberts is "better known as J.D. Robb." What can I say? Carla Neggers says I'm a cheap date. **The Author "Better Known As" Responds...**Roberts took exception to several inaccuracies in Goldman's piece. Of course there's the one about her *nom de plume*. Then there was the one about mainstream publishers poaching HQ's star writers when Roberts had already been writing for Putnam for ten years before she left Harlequin/Silhouette to focus solely on writing mainstream projects. **As you might guess** the article elicited a storm of controversy among many authors on the loops, but you know, other than get behind Roberts regarding the blatant inaccuracies and list my own response to Goldman's truly reprehensible and irresponsible use of journalistic license, I really don't understand the outcry. Once you get past the inaccuracies, the insulting opening paragraph and realize the thing was written by a woman obviously testing her balls against the men's in a financial magazine like *Forbes*...well, it really wasn't that bad.

— TdR



**Laura Resnick is**

# **THE COMELY CURMUDGEON**

## **“A Christmas Fable”**

And, lo, it came to pass that the writers cried out for justice—or at least for timely payments and comprehensive royalty statements. Or, barring that, discounted printer supplies and first place in line at the next Ninc Conference dessert buffet.

“And while we’re at it,” said Resnick—who, rather predictably, cried the first, loudest, and longest, as well as using the most curse words—“can we clean up this whole reserve-against-returns system? And how about establishing a five-year prison sentence in a maximum security facility for any publisher that tries to get away with unreasonable reversion clauses?”

“And how would you define ‘unreasonable,’ you silly blonde writer whom no powerful magnate would ever take seriously?” asked Poodle Books, a publisher on the hillside.

“Ten years, Poodle. Sound familiar?” Resnick replied. “And how did you get a silly name like Poodle, anyhow?”

“We thought it would be cool to name ourselves after a striped herbivore.” “But poodles have curls, not stripes, and they are carnivores,” quoth Resnick, who watched Animal Planet religiously.

“One little mistake,” Poodle grumbled to the many writers who huddled in the cold upon the hillside. Except for Robyn Carr, who did dwell in the desert with her pack of wild hunting poodles who were all probably lounging poolside at this very moment, which really annoyed Resnick who did dwell in a drafty hovel in the damp Ohio Valley.

“By the way, Poodle,” said Resnick, “are you aware that I waited more than a year for a response to my written requests for reversion of rights on the book I wrote for you? A book which, yea, has been out of print for years?”

“I believe you mean ‘temporarily out of stock’ for years,” spake Poodle, “which is not the same thing.”

“Don’t be coy.”

“And did I mention that we won’t be issuing fall royalty checks until next year because we’re busy installing a new abacus?” Poodle smiled serenely. “I, of course, will still be paid on time. I’m sure you understand.”

“I think you should spend five years showering nervously with your back to the wall as penance for such a sin,” Resnick said unto Poodle, “but this doesn’t actually

affect me, because you’ve never admitted to owing me any royalties.”

But, lo, Poodle was suddenly gone, as if called away by more important business than attending to justice for writers.

“Yea, if I were paid better advances,” cried Resnick as the cold wind whipped through her cheap raiment, “I could live in sunny California, like Catherine Coulter, and wear nice clothing which I did not have to buy discount. Then would my jacket photos look classy and chic, like hers.”

“Nay, it would never be thus,” proclaimed Terey Daly Ramin. “I’ve seen Coulter, and you lacketh her style.”

“Thinketh you that I would ever listen to anyone foolish enough to dwell in Michigan in December?” said Resnick, shivering in the night. “I know! I will go unto Jill Marie Landis, who doth dwell in Hawaii, and beg for shelter there.”

But upon finding Resnick on her doorstep, Landis did say, “You’re noisy and you attract trouble—”

“That is true,” admitted Resnick, “but I am tidy and will rarely borrow the car without asking.”

“I cannot currently entertain weary pilgrims in search of justice from publishers,” spake Landis, “because I have a deadline.”

Then came a voice from on high: “So do you, Resnick. Stop wandering in the wilderness and get back to work.”

“The manuscript is practically finished,” Resnick lied to the Editor On High. “I have merely some tweaking left to do.”

A bolt of lightning struck Resnick where she stood, and she was smitten. Also smoking and smelling of sulfur. “That’s what you get for lying,” said Carla Neggers.

“Where did you come from?” demanded Resnick, patting at her smoldering clothing, which now looked worse than ever. “Aren’t we still in Hawaii?”

“No.”

“But—”

“You always did have trouble writing transitions,” Neggers said. “How goes your quest?”

“I cannot find a publisher who will write timely advance checks or issue comprehensive royalty statements. And forget about reasonable reserves against returns. I am

wracked with despair!"

"Yes, I heard," spake Neggers. "*Everyone* heard."

"Because my mission is noble and my cause is just?"

"Because your voice is shrill and carries far."

"What are you doing here, anyhow? Has thou been sent to give me a sign?"

"Funny you should ask." Neggers pointed into the Publishing Abyss. "Behold, a sign!"

"Hey, where did that frightening and terrible abyss come from all of a sudden?"

"It was added during revisions." Neggers pointed again. "Now go ye forth into the Abyss in search of justice for writers."

Resnick peered down into its fiery depths. "Are you nuts? I'm not going down there!" "You have to. It's part of the story."

"But, lo, I have a deadline. I should probably be getting back to w—"

And Neggers pushed Resnick into the Abyss, crying out as the Curmudgeon fell, "Sorry! Jasmine Cresswell told me to do that."

"She is a harsh taskmistress!" wailed Resnick as she plummeted to the fires below.

Resnick descended through the Abyss until she came to a place known as the Evil Empire, and she said unto them, "Are you ever going to revert the rights on the eleventh book I wrote for you? It's been out of print since I was still young, for the love of Webster's Ninth! Yet your last letter to me on this subject advised me not even to ask again until Ingram's freezes over!"

"Yea, you are not done falling," replied the Evil Empire. "Have a nice trip."

Upon descending further, Resnick cried, "In the name of all that is printable, where am I now?"

"Relax," came a voice from the void, "this is a leisurely dimension."

"Hang on, I think I've heard of this place," said Resnick. "Didn't your writers sue you to get a million dollars which you were too leisurely to pay them of your own accord?"

"We hoped that would be forgotten by now, for, lo, it was only a million bucks, and what's a little thing like that among friends?" "I'm going to kill Neggers for sending me here," muttered Resnick as she continued falling.

"Jasmine made me do it!" Neggers' voice echoed through the void.

"But Jasmine authorizes my *NINK* checks in a timely fashion," Resnick shouted back, "so I must cut her some slack!"

"You are a publishing slut!" Neggers proclaimed.

"Don't you have a deadline to get back to?" Resnick said pointedly. And, yea, Neggers disappeared from the story.

"What now?" Resnick wondered.

"Funny you should ask," said her agent.

"Oh, there you are! Where in the galleys have you

been while I've been plummeting through this echoing void?"

"I've come to find out if you're going to make your deadline."

"How can you even ask me that?" Resnick cried defensively. "I can write a novel faster than publishers can write a check. In fact, I've done it in the past."

"But, yea, are you going to make your deadline?" her agent persisted.

"Are your ears popping?" Resnick asked as she plummeted. "I think my ears are popping."

"About that deadline..."

"A funny thing happened to me on the way to the Abyss..."

"Because if you're not going to make it..." "I am on a noble quest!" Resnick proclaimed. "And—haven't you heard?—I am wracked with despair!"

"But what should I tell the Editor On High?" her agent asked.

"Say you couldn't get me on the phone."

"Done."

And verily Resnick continued plummeting through the Publishing Abyss. She saw publishers who withheld moneys for years, as well as publishers who actively rewarded plagiarism. She encountered agents whose clients were suing them for many sins, and agents who just weren't returning their clients' calls. And then there was Hamzone.com, the retail bookseller which actively discouraged its customers from buying new books—and claimed this was a *good* thing for writers. Still descending, Resnick came upon publishers who refused to accept good books once they were delivered, and thus left writers hungry and wondering how to pay the mortgage while marketing those manuscripts elsewhere.

Resnick also saw publishers who mostly meant well, and who even provided effective packaging and pretty good cover copy, but who nonetheless couldn't seem to issue a check in less time than it took Rome to rise, conquer the world, fall, and start attracting archaeologists.

"Hark!" she suddenly cried in recognition. "Don't I write for you?" "Verily, it is so," replied her publisher, emerging from the fires of the Abyss. "Are you going to make your deadline?"

"I'm kind of busy plummeting right now," Resnick replied.

"Oh, this should be interesting. You know what's on the next page of this eternal fiery void, don't you?"

"No."

"The Internal Revenue Service."

"Merciful piles of recycled paper!"

"About that deadline..."

"Can you help me find my way out of this Abyss?" asked Resnick.

"As it happens," replied her publisher, "the Editor On High has sent someone to guide your way."

"Remind me to send the Editor a







## THE COMELY CURMUJGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ Christmas card.” Resnick looked around. “Where is my guide to a better place?”

“That would be me,” said Mary Jo Putney. “We must depart right now, without delay, while the Moon is in the Random House and Jupiter aligns with Marketing.”

“That matters?”

“Well, it makes it much easier to get a cab at this time of night.”

“I suddenly feel an inexplicable surge of optimism,” said Resnick. “Where are we going?”

“Lo, we are following that bright light in the night sky,” quoth Putney, “for it will lead us to the founding of a new publishing house such as this industry has never known before.”

“What light?” spake Resnick. “I don’t see any light. Where is this light?”

“I see it!” cried Vicki Lewis Thompson.

“So do I!” exclaimed Julie Kistler.

“Why, that light is so bright,” said Steven Womack, “that I must wear sunglasses to shield my sensitive eyes from its magnificent brilliance.”

“Southerners are always so wordy,” said Resnick. “Anyhow, where *is* this light? I don’t see any damn light.”

“Ignore her,” said Barbara Keiler, “she’s always like this.”

“Trust Resnick to ruin a perfectly good scene,” added Pat Rice.

Then Putney proclaimed, “Behold! A new publisher has announced it is acquiring manuscripts up on the summit.”

“Oh, wait! Wait!” Resnick cried, looking to the summit upon which the light was shining. “I think... Yes, I think I see it now! *I see it!* A new publisher has come to us this cold night!”

“And it promises comprehensive quarterly royalty statements actually listing everything a writer needs to know!” cried Evan Maxwell.

“Can it be so?” asked Victoria Thompson.

“It proclaims a reversion period which will not last even longer than the reign of Queen Victoria!” said Anne Holmberg with tears of joy misting her eyes. Resnick fell to her cheaply clad knees. “I hear it now! I hear the voice! It promises all writers will receive advance checks within six weeks of making a deal and within eight weeks of delivering a manuscript!”

And, lo, the writers came to the summit, eager to know this new publishing house. Thus it came to pass that many talented and hardworking writers competed for the right to write for this noble and just publisher. Seeing this, the other publishers gnashed their teeth, tore their garments, poured ashes on their heads, and wailed their protests... until, finally, they all had no choice but to offer writers justice, too. And, yea, the publishing world was a much better place than it had ever been before.

And so Resnick, who could finally buy a decent coat, now spake thus to the writers who had followed her quest and stuck around until the very end of the story: “Merry Christmas to all, and to all a goodnight.”

— The End —

*Ed. Note: Until next month, of course... unless you neglect to renew and miss the Curmudgeon and more every month in NINK. Remember to renew now....*

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