

N I N K

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An Introduction to Kindleboards

BY LILIANA HART

It seems there are new social media sites developed every day, and they can all become overwhelming when trying to add promotional responsibilities on top of deadlines. I've spent the last year trying a little bit of everything—weeding out what didn't work for me, and embracing the things that did. And to be honest, what works for me isn't always going to work for everyone else. The one thing I've learned in this business is that you've got to take some chances and try things that might take you outside your comfort zone. As an introvert (as most of us probably are), I can do just what I need from the safety and comfort of my writing chair without having to be too sociable. I hadn't even heard of Kindleboards until I started doing research on self-publishing a year ago, but it's become one of the most useful tools for marketing I know.

Kindleboards began as a reader forum for those who owned a Kindle, though that isn't a requirement to belong to the group. It has more than 61,000 members (only an estimated 5,000 are authors), and a variety of message boards that let fans talk about the books they love most, as well as letting them give recommendations of their favorite reads. The people who are members of Kindleboards all have one thing in common—they love to read.

KB is not only a fantastic place to find new books, but it's a gold mine as far as finding readers and connecting with them. There aren't a lot of other places where you can find that many avid readers in one place. I can find those who love to read mysteries or thrillers, romance or sci-fi. They're all there. I've also met those who will be fans for life, and others who will be friends for life. Kindleboards is a great place to be.

What makes it really great is that any time I post a new thread or take part in a discussion, I notice an immediate uptick in sales.

The biggest reason for the sales jump is my signature line. All of my book covers are in my signature line, and they link directly to that book's Amazon page. It's a quick impulse buy from readers who were drawn in

by my covers or who liked what I had to say. I also get an enormous number of website hits from Kindleboards. The people on this forum are curious about who they're conversing with, but they're not afraid to take chances on new authors. Like I said, they love to read.

The thing you have to understand about Kindleboards is that, for the most part, it is strictly a reader forum, and they don't like it when authors go in and try to promote their books when they're trying to have a serious discussion about Stephen King. In fact, they can get downright nasty, *Continued on page 5* ▶

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Novelists, Inc.

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2012 Conference

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Chair: Open

Marketing

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Nink Online Index

Denise Lynn

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Chair: Open

Royalty Committee

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Chair: David Wind

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are available on the website:

<http://www.ninc.com>

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Address changes may be made on the
website.

For members without Internet access,
send changes to the Central Coordinator.

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permission.

Introducing...

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. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

Membership Chair: James LePore
leporej5@optonline.net

New Applicants:

Sandra Balzo, Pompano Beach, FL
Barbara Freethy, Burlingame, CA
Candice Hern, Minneapolis, MN
Joyce Lamb, Herndon, VA
Marti Leimbach, Springfield, Wickens Corner, Beenham,
Reading, Berkshire, England
Pam Payne (Tori Scott), Wills Point, TX

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Mary Chase (Mary Chase Comstock), Portland, OR
Carolyn Comito (C.J. Archer), Keilor East,
Victoria, Australia
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Janelle Schneider, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Heather Snow, Overland Park, KS

NINC has room to grow...
Recommend membership to your colleagues.
Prospective members may apply online at
<http://www.ninc.com>. Refer members at ninc.com.
Go to Members Only, "Member Services" and click
"Refer a New Member to NINC." Take NINC
brochures to conferences. Email Pari Taichert with your
mailing address and requested number of booklets:
ptaichert@comcast.net.

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.

Biographies for Upcoming Election

President-elect

Terri Brisbin, an award-winning author and three-time RWA RITA® finalist, has seen her historical and paranormal romances published in more than 20 languages and 25 countries around the world since 1998. She's written more than 33 novels, novellas, and short stories for Berkley/Jove, Harlequin and Kensington Books. Now working on more romances for release through 2013, Terri has also been self-publishing her backlist books. When not living the glamorous life of a romance author in the southern New Jersey suburbs, Terri spends her time being a married mom and a dental hygienist to hundreds while plotting and planning future stories.

Secretary

Sylvie Kurtz is the author of 21 novels. She writes adventures that explore the complexity of the human mind and the thrill of suspense. She likes dark chocolate, soft wool, and sappy movies. Technology confuses her, but she's good at taking notes.

2013 Nominating Committee Candidates (5 to be elected)

Lori Devoti has written for Harlequin, Pocket, and Kensington Books and is embracing the new move to self-publishing with both arms. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin and has a degree in journalism with an emphasis in advertising. She spends her days writing, teaching writing, and sharing pictures of cute cats on Facebook.

Greg Herren is the award-winning author of 19 published novels and 50 short stories. He has also edited 12 anthologies, including the award-winning *Love, Bourbon Street: Reflections on New Orleans*. His young adult novel *Sleeping Angel* won the Moonbeam Gold Medal for Excellence in Young Adult Mystery/Horror. He works as an editor for Bold Strokes Books and as an HIV counselor/researcher in New Orleans. He lives in the lower Garden District, about three blocks and \$3 million from the official Garden District.

Tanya Anne Crosby has written 16 historical romances, all of which have graced numerous bestseller lists, including the *New York Times* and *USA Today*. Her first novel was published in 1992 for Avon Books; her fifth historical romance, *Once Upon a Kiss*, launched the Avon Romantic Treasures line. She's a five-time nominee for a *Romantic Times* Career Achievement Award. Tanya is also an award-winning journalist. After a 10-year hiatus, she is at work on her first contemporary romantic suspense for Kensington, scheduled for release in February 2013.

Michele Ann Young writes Regency romances under her own name and more recently for Harlequin Historical as Ann Lethbridge. She has 11 published full-length novels under her belt, two novellas and approximately nine short stories in print or digital. Several of her books have been nominated for, and in a couple of cases have won, awards, including a Daphne Du Maurier Award for Excellence in the Historical Category. In her previous life, she was a senior administrator in a Canadian university and loved it, but loves writing more. She has served as the founding chairperson of her university employee group's association, secretary of the RWA Toronto Romance Writers, and president of RWA's Beau Monde chapter. She is pleased to have the opportunity to undertake this small service for NINC should she be elected. ▶

Under the pseudonym Binnie Syril, Baltimore writer **Binnie Syril Braunstein** has authored three romance novels and 49 published short stories, as well as reviews, articles, and a frequently updated romance bibliography, *A Bouquet of Books*. She served as “Writer in Residence” at two Baltimore area schools and has developed courses on writing short stories, romance novels, essays, personal memoirs, as well as on publicity and library research for writers. She is the editor of Novelist, Inc.’s *NINC Blast* and a publicist for romance and literary authors. She holds a bachelor of music degree in voice and a master’s degree in library science. She worked as a professional librarian for 11 years before beginning to write full time.

Always a passionate lover of books, *New York Times* bestselling author **Phoebe Conn** first answered a call to write in 1980 and swiftly embarked on her own mythic journey. Her first book, *Love’s Elusive Flame*, was a Zebra historical in 1983. Her 36th book, a contemporary, *Fierce Love*, is a May release from Samhain Publishing. She has more than seven million copies in print of her historical, contemporary and futuristic books written under her own name as well as her pseudonym, Cinnamon Burke, and she remains as enthusiastic as ever about writing. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Art History and a master’s degree in Education. She is a member of RWA, PEN, AWritersWork.com and Backlistebooks.com.

A member of NINC for many years, **Charlotte Hubbard** has attended every conference since she joined and recently served three years as NINC’s secretary. In her 20+ years as a published author, she has written confessions, Western historicals, erotica, inspirational romance, and is currently writing two Amish series for two different publishers.

Diana Peterfreund has published eight novels for adults and teens, including the four-book *Secret Society Girl* series, the “killer unicorn novels” *Rampant* and *Ascendant*, and *For Darkness Shows the Stars*, a post-apocalyptic retelling of Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*. She has also written several critically acclaimed short stories and a variety of nonfiction essays about popular children’s literature. She is a member of RWA, WRW, SFWA, and has been a part of NINC since she was first eligible to join five years ago. Diana lives in Washington D.C., with her family.

Jana DeLeon is former CFO who jumped off the corporate ladder to write fiction, although she confesses to a lingering spreadsheet addiction. Now, she writes boring technical manuals by day and mystery/romance by dawn’s early light. She published five books with Dorchester and currently writes for Harlequin Intrigue. She began indie publishing in 2010 with her Dorchester backlist and released her first straight-to-indie book in 2012. She received the 2012 RT Reviewers Choice Award for Best First Series Romance. Jana and her husband love animals and have their own version of the Brady Bunch—three dogs and three cats. She grew up in the swamps of Louisiana and sets all of her books in fictional bayou towns. Now, she lives in Dallas, Texas and is thankful every day for swimming pools, enormous AC units and swamp coolers.

Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

Barnes & Noble Giveaway for Kids

Customers who buy a Nook Tablet in a Barnes & Noble bricks-and-mortar store will receive a promotion code enabling them to download a collection of free e-Books as part of the bookseller’s Nook Kids Summer Reading Program. The program is aimed at readers aged 12 and older. The titles offered are *Blue Bloods* by Melissa de la Cruz; *Angel Burn* by L. A. Weatherly; *The Enemy* by Charlie Higson—each of which is the first title of a series—; and *Jessica’s Guide to Dating on the Dark Side* by Beth Fantaskey.” This group of titles will be offered through August 5. Titles for older teen readers and for younger readers will be offered later in the summer.

GalleyCat

An Introduction to Kindleboards

Continued from page 1 but it's a simple matter of making sure you read the forum decorum before you make your first post. It's a well-moderated forum, so things never get too out of hand. In fact, it's one of the best moderated and cordial forums I've ever belonged to. Just use your best judgment and read the rules.

In the last couple of years, they've added the Writer's Café to the Kindleboards. This is the only area on Kindleboards where writers can talk about craft, covers, plot issues, bad reviews, etc. And it's the only place where you can promote your books (in the Book Bazaar). It's also a great place to get information from other writers. If you have a question about anything, most likely someone on KB has an answer. I can't tell you how much I've learned from the other authors there, and they're all willing to share what is working for them. Just like any place you go, KB has its fair share of dumba**es, but they're mostly ignored and that topic is probably best left for an entirely different kind of article for *Nink*.

The other great thing about the Writer's Café is that it's not restricted to writers. Those 61,000 members who love to read lurk in the Writer's Café because they want to know what we're working on, what problems we face, and about our successes and even our failures. They're there to see when we post that we have a new release out, and they're watching when we have a book go on sale or go free. And if they love your book, they go back to the reader message boards and spread the word about the great new author they just discovered.

I'm convinced there is no better place to find a target audience that large anywhere else online.

Liliana Hart is the author of both the Addison Holmes and J.J. Graves mystery series, as well as the MacKenzie Family romance series. Since self-publishing a little over a year ago, she's sold more than 300,000 copies of her books. She can be reached at lilianahartauthor@gmail.com or through her website at www.lilianahart.com

NINC Bulletin Board

NINC Bulletin Board Compiled by Kit Frazier / kitfrazier@yahoo.com

Upcoming Conferences and Book Festivals of Note

Killer Nashville: A Conference for Thriller, Suspense, Mystery Writers & Literature Lovers, Nashville, TN, August 23-26

www.KillerNashville.com

Colorado Gold Conference, Denver, CO, September 7-9 www.rmfw.org/conference

Florida Heritage Book Festival & Writers Conference, St. Augustine, FL; September 13-15

www.fhbookfest.com

Fall in Love with Writing: A Conference for All Genres, Albuquerque, NM, September 16-18

The Southern California Writers Conference (SCWC), Los Angeles, CA September 21-23

<http://www.writersconference.com/>

Hampton Roads Writers Conference, Virginia Beach, VA, September 20-22

<http://www.hamptonroadswriters.org/2012conference.php>

Writers' Police Academy, Jamestown, NC. September 20-23 <http://www.writerspoliceacademy.com/>

Central Ohio Fiction Writers Conference, Columbus, OH, September 28-29

<http://www.cofw.org/conference.html>

Bouchercon Crime Fiction Convention, Cleveland, OH. October 4-7

<http://www.bouchercon2012.com/>

Write on the Sound Writers' Conference, Edmonds, WA October 5-7 www.writeonthesound.com.

Moonlight and Magnolias, Atlanta, GA October 5-7

<http://www.georgiaromancewriters.org/mm-conference/>



Profitable Partnerships: Publishing à la Carte

October 25-28, 2012

Crowne Plaza White Plains NY

Fee for NINC Members: \$375

(includes both First Word and Conference!)
Payable in one lump sum or three payments of \$125

Fee for Industry Professionals:

\$260 for First Word and Conference,
\$150 for First Word only,
or \$110 Conference only

Fee for Nonmember Writers:

\$195 for First Word only

Win a Seat at the Table!

The NincThink Roundtable, that is. Last month, we announced a new type of session for the conference—NincThink Roundtables. Since our theme this year is Profitable Partnerships, we wanted to find a way to drive home the reality that in this brave new publishing world, *everyone* gets to play.

Maybe this sounds idealistic, but we believe that NINC should lead the way in modeling this new truth: It's not "electronic vs. traditional," "indie vs. legacy" or "authors vs. publishers" or any other "us vs. them" model. We want to send the message that NINC is about getting *rid* of those distinctions and working together to get top-quality novels to awesome readers.

We decided a fun way to do this would be by using a Roundtable format in addition to our already great panel, workshop, and night owl sessions. As we explained last month, each Roundtable will have 12 participants, consisting of about equal numbers of industry guests and NINC members. Each participant will submit a discussion question, and the 12-person group will have a casual conversation in response to those questions. Audience members will be able to sit in on the conversations, although the audience won't be allowed to ask questions or participate in the discussion.

It's a format meant to emphasize partnership among professional peers and give authors and industry guests an equal voice to discuss important topics. For detailed information on the Roundtable topics, go to this page on the NINC website: <http://www.ninc.com/conferences/2012/Roundtables.asp>

Now, to make these NincThink Roundtable sessions happen what we need is...you.

If you are a NINC member, we want to hear your voice. There will be 10 Roundtable sessions, and we will need six to seven NINC members to appear on each—which means we need between 60 and 70 NINC members to sign up for Roundtables. If we don't have you, we can't have the Roundtable sessions. Simple as that.

We decided to create a fun way to assign all those slots. Not a drawing. Not a plain old sign-up. And

we're certainly not going to hand-pick all those people! Instead, since everyone gets to play, we are having...

cue drumroll

ahem...DRUMROLL, please!

better, thanks

A Contest: The Great Novelists, Inc. NincThink Challenge

(And, no, the contest is not who can actually say that aloud five times fast!)

cue applause and cheering

Here's how it will work:

Early in September, for five days, we'll post once a day on the NINC Blog. Each day we'll be opening slots for two Roundtables (we'll post that schedule later so you know which Roundtables are being opened on each day of the contest.) We will announce the dates of the contest on the NincLink loop as well as the Conference Loop, so don't worry—you'll know when it is.

The blog posts will each have a clue about one of our industry guests (and a few links to point you in the right direction). What you have to do is figure out the right answer, and then click on the registration link. The registration link is password protected. The answer to the clue will be the password. If you get it right, you'll unlock the registration page and can sign up for one of the two Roundtables in play that day.

When our slots are full for the day, we'll edit the post to say so. And then we'll do it all over again the next day.

(If any of you participated in the contest to be a beta-tester for the Pottermore website last summer, you'll recognize that we sort of borrowed the concept from there and tweaked it a bit. We solemnly promise not to open the contest in the middle of the night, though!)

We hope you all will get into the spirit of the game and help make our debut Roundtable sessions a huge success.

Here's what you'll need to do to enter the Challenge:

Register for the NINC Conference: you MUST be registered and fully paid up by August 31, 2012 in order to participate in the Challenge. (To forestall questions on this—if your NINC membership is in process and you can't get registered by the deadline, please email Kelly McClymer ASAP so that we can help you with this. We think new NINC members are awesomely cool, and we'd love to have you at the conference and on our Roundtables.)

Sign up for the NINC Conference Loop: Kelly McClymer sends out an invitation to the Conference Loop shortly after you register for the conference. We will be announcing the contest schedule on that loop and providing more information and answering questions, so it is essential for you to subscribe to that loop after you register.

Check out the Roundtable page on the NINC Conference website to find out what topics are being offered and which industry guests will be on each one. (Or look at the list on page 8 for a quick tease about the topics.) Each day of the contest, we will open slots for two Roundtables. You can only win a slot for **one** Roundtable (you can keep trying until you win a slot!). So you'll need to plan ahead and decide which Roundtables you would be interested in participating on before the contest begins, and then throw your hat in the ring.

Tell your NINC friends about the Challenge, especially if they aren't good at paying attention to the loop or the newsletter. Make sure they get registered by the deadline. Friends don't let friends miss out on the NincThink Challenge!

We can't wait to see which of you end up on the Roundtables! They're going to be fabulous, thanks to you and thanks to our industry guests.

So be watching...

The Great Novelists, Inc NincThink Challenge is coming!

Questions? Email Meredith Efken (mefken@cox.net) or Kelly McClymer (kelly.mcclymer@gmail.com)





Win a Seat at the Table

Roundtables with a focus on Traditional publishing:

“Know When To Hold Them, Know When To Fold Them” Decision Making in a Tough Market will focus on the process of decision making, including issues related to contracts, options, working relationships, and more. *Industry Guests: Nina Taublib (Putnam), Wendy McCurdy (Berkley/Penguin), Donald Maass (Maass Agency), Lou Aronica (FictionStudio), Jim McCarthy (Dystel & Goderich)*

Subsidiary Rights and Tie-in Products will be about which subsidiary and tie-in options are important to pursue, to fight to retain, as well as which ones aren't, and whether those rights important enough to look for an agent who will sell them. *Industry Guests: Larry Norton (InScribe Digital), Dominique Raccah (Sourcebooks), Elizabeth Jennings (author/translator)*

Roundtables with a focus on Indie/e-Book publishing:

What Does “Quality Fiction” Mean? will be a continuation of the panel topic from Thursday about “quality”—How is the definition of that concept changing now that readers serve as gatekeepers in the new marketplace? *Industry Guests: Lauren Abramo (Dystel & Goderich), Jen Talty (Cool Gus Publishing), Lisa Stone Hardt (freelance editor), Pam Headrick (e-Book designer)*

“Penny-wise, Pound-Foolish” Sales Strategies will focus on specific sales strategies for selling e-books, particularly self-published ones. *Industry Guests: Jen Talty, Julie Ortolon (bestselling author), Rachel Chou (Open Road Publishing), Dan Slater (Amazon)*

Roundtables focusing on both Traditional and Indie publishing:

Role of the Agent in a Changing Marketplace will focus on how agents serve the needs of the traditional and self-published authors they represent with respect to conflict of interest issues, open communication, the scope or limitations of agency agreements, and other agent-related topics. *Industry Guests: Jennifer Brehl (William Morrow), Nita Taublib, Donald Maass, Robert Gottlieb (Trident Media), Jim McCarthy*

Going Indie or Going Traditional? will be an open, wide-ranging conversation about the thought processes of authors and the mindset of industry insiders with respect to this very personal decision. *Industry Guests: Jennifer Brehl, Dominique Raccah, Wendy McCurdy, Jen Talty, Dan Slater (Amazon), Barbara Freethy (bestselling author)*

Promotion Planning will cover topics such as developing a marketing/promotion plan to best suit the author *and* the books, as well as how to evaluate the plan's success and how to work with the team you pull together, from artists to publishers to booksellers. *Industry Guests: Barbara Freethy, Larry Norton, Thubten Comerford (social media expert), Rachel Chou*

Nurturing the Creative Spirit in a Number-Crunching World will address the creative process and how to handle burn-out, discouragement, and other issues that affect authors and impact the publishing team. *Industry Guests: Dominique Raccah, Jane Dystel (Dystel & Goderich), Sue Grimshaw (Random House), Kim Killion (cover designer/author), Melissa Rosati (creativity coach), Lou Aronica*

In the Other Person's Shoes—How to Work with Your Support Team will be about business communication (and miscommunication), etiquette, supportive relationships, and all the other things we need to understand to build strong working partnerships with our publishing teams. *Industry Guests: Barbara Freethy, Thubten Comerford, Jen Talty, Kim Killion, Lisa Stone Hardt*

Creatively Connecting with Readers will be a candid conversation about who our readers are, what attracts them to our books, what they want (and don't want) from us, and will draw on the knowledge and experience of audience-focused writers and market-focused industry guests. *Industry Guests: Larry Norton, Dominique Raccah, Rachel Chou, Sue Grimshaw, Pam Headrick*

Everything You Wanted to Know about the Bestseller Lists (But Were Afraid to Ask)

BY ELAINE ISAAK

This year my RWA chapter asked a simple question of its members: What do you need to get to the next level? As the Published Author Network (PAN) liaison, part of my job was to take the answers from this survey and turn them into challenges, and find speakers who would help our members get there. A few of our published members answered, “A bestseller!” Rather than shrug this off as a facetious response, I decided to do some research and offer a presentation on how the bestseller lists work and what might be done to get a better shot. Herewith, the results of my study (so far).

There are actually four lists, compiled in different ways:

1. The Holy Grail of authorial achievement: *The New York Times*. Generated by a survey of more than 3,000 stores, the NYT list is still the summit. It now breaks out titles by hardcover, trade, fiction, nonfiction, and children’s.
2. The *USA Today* list combines all types of books on one list, using data provided by booksellers and combining various formats to determine the book’s total.
3. *Publishers Weekly* compiles its list using Bookscan point-of-sales data, which represents only about 65 percent of actual books sold.
4. The relatively new BookSense indie list, for which each participating independent bookstore sends a ranked list of local bestsellers for compilation into the aggregate.

Amazon.com also compiles lists from its data, which are updated hourly and can be examined by various genres and subgenres. These are very useful for looking at what’s hot, and for getting a quick idea of the range of works in your area, especially regarding self-published or e-first books. But the Amazon lists do not yet have the cachet of the traditional lists, nor have they attracted the same level of academic inquiry.

The bestseller lists measure sales velocity: selling fast in a short period of time. All of my promotional strategies for a new release involve selling as many as possible during that first month and, ideally, during the first week the book hits the shelves. There are many books that sell more copies than some of the titles on the bestseller list, but do so more gradually, so they never actually hit the list.

In the U.S., the five major publishers—Random House, HarperCollins, Time Warner Publishing, Penguin USA, and Simon & Schuster—are responsible for about 80 percent of bestsellers; the five majors together with the next five largest publishers—Macmillan, Hyperion, Rodale Press, Houghton Mifflin, and Harlequin Enterprises—control around 98 percent of all U.S. bestsellers. You can further break down which imprints have the most titles on the list for the longest period of time. For example, in mass market at *Publishers Weekly* in 2006, Berkley, Jove, Bantam, Pocket, and Avon appear at the top. However, there are some interesting anomalies further down, like Warner Vision, with the highest number of titles—25—reaching the list, but only staying there for a collective 27 weeks.

If you were at NINC’s 2011 conference, you heard Carolyn Pittis of HarperCollins point out that the NYT fiction list has 780 slots per year. Only 100 of those are actually open slots: the others are already accounted for by the “name” authors when their new books come out (Tom Clancy, Danielle Steel—you know the ones we’re talking about). It’s not that these names are carved in stone, exactly, but rather that their books represent guaranteed sales volume. So, Carolyn’s analysis continued...in 2010, there were 288,355 traditionally published titles—making your chances of hitting the NYT list about two in 10,000. Your chances of getting struck by lightning are only one in 10,000, so you’re still more likely to be a bestseller!

What about those “name” authors who are already on one of the lists? We have a few NINC members who enjoy this happy status—and I don’t intend for my research to in any way detract from their

success. Many of the books on these lists have some weaknesses, but they're all there because readers wish to devour them: that's why they are worth studying. A Stanford Business School survey finds little additional benefit for authors who have slots on the list. But for the first-time bestseller, sales increase by 57 percent. Aiming high to get on the list could have a huge impact on your career. Staying there pleases your agent and editor, but it's really the first appearance that does the job for your sales.

If you (or your editor) has any influence over the timing of your book release, avoid June and July for paperback releases because you'll be competing with the "beach reads." For hardcovers, avoid late fall, which forces you to compete with Christmas gift book sales. Some of the name authors have very specific release dates (like Mother's Day for Mary Higgins Clark and Father's Day for Tom Clancy), so it's probably best to avoid those dates if you're in a similar genre. I'd like to compile a calendar of these dates to see what it reveals, but that's a big project for another time.

So how to shoot for your spot on the list?

New authors get there in a couple of ways. For the period of 2003 to 2010, first novels occupied 8 to 14 percent of slots on the *Publishers Weekly* list. If you're reading this article, you're already beyond that stage (though it may tempt you to try a pseudonym). In fact, most authors don't hit the lists until they have several titles already out, then they achieve a breakout book, as Stephen King, Ridley Pearson, and Dan Brown did. Still, as you've noticed, it's harder and harder to get a publisher to stick with you through those first few moderately successful titles until you reach the big time.

Can you manipulate your way onto the list? It's possible. The most infamous story occurred in 1995 when the authors of a nonfiction book called *The Discipline of Market Leaders* purchased more than 10,000 copies of their own book at bookstores that reported sales to Bookscan. The authors considered buying their own work an investment that would pay for itself, not because of the sales directly, but because of additional benefits like speaking engagements and consulting gigs. The book reached number eight on the list—where it sat for 15 weeks.

However, writing the kind of book likely to hit the list is a more comfortable and less expensive option for those who feel they can harness the muse. When Nicholas Sparks decided he wanted to write a book, he analyzed sales over a period of time to determine that each sub-genre appearing had about three big-name writers—but that "love stories" (his terminology) had only one, so he decided to write in that genre, angling to become a major voice in that narrow field. If you pick up the books analyzing the bestseller lists, you will find that there are a few major themes or areas that crop up again and again, and combinations of those themes are more likely to hit big. Think religion, historical settings (especially Civil War), a secret revealed.

Obviously, not all authors who try to write a book to specifications like this will succeed—you need to have sufficient writing chops to carry off the work—but Sparks is not the only author to have done so. YA and sexy vampires are hot? Enter Stephanie Meyer, who had the assistance of former film industry analyst and current best-selling author David Farland to develop her concept. Farland offers a workshop and e-book entitled *The Million-Dollar Outline* geared toward this approach. I'll let you know how it works out for me. Michael Maxen's March 1, 1998 article for the *New York Times Magazine* details the process of the two authors who wrote *The Eleventh Plague*, a work deliberately crafted for bestsellerdom that earned its authors \$3 million in advances and film options. Their second book seems to have bombed, however. Still, I think \$3 mil is nice compensation for the lack of career longevity.

Does this mean we have entered the arena of the dreaded "formula fiction" so many of us are accused of writing? Yes and no. Most fiction, when analyzed, reveals certain structures and tropes—these are things that readers respond to over and over. If you want your reader to enjoy your book, you would do well to be aware of them and to violate them only when completely necessary. Most of us could probably come up with a list for our own genres. In his article, Michael Maxen quotes the following list for the thriller genre:

The hero is an expert.

The villain is an expert.

You must watch all of the villainy over the shoulder of the villain.

The hero has a team of experts in various fields behind him.

Two or more on the team must fall in love.

Two or more on the team must die.

The villain must turn his attentions from his initial goal to the team.

The villain and the hero must live to do battle again in the sequel.

All deaths must proceed from the individual to the group: i.e., never say that the bomb exploded and 15,000 people were killed. Instead, give the detailed experience of specific people.

If you get bogged down, just kill somebody.

What we're talking about are some basic guidelines for creating a sympathetic hero, giving him a worthy opponent, creating interesting stakes for the reader, and raising those stakes. Think through the plot if you start removing one or more of these elements...how well does it work? Some authors have done without the team—but you'll often find sidekicks or helpers brought in and killed off to heighten the reader's worry for the main character. Many series books feature different villains, but similar motivations or spheres of operation. And the guidelines still give plenty of leeway for who these people are, what battle they are fighting, and in what milieu. It's a formula in the same way that a recipe is a formula for a cake—it still takes a good chef to make it memorable.

Let's get out there and whip up some bestsellers!

Want to learn more about analyzing the best seller lists? If you're in the planning phases for a new work, I strongly suggest tracking the lists for a few weeks comparing titles in your genre. Also, here are some of the books I consulted:

The #1 New York Times Best Seller, by John Bear

The Making of a Bestseller, by Brian Hill and Dee Power

Making the List, by Michael Korda (about the *Publishers Weekly* list)

Hit Lit, by James W. Hall (2012, analyzing 12 of the century's bestsellers)

Fantasy author Elaine Isaak hopes that her newfound knowledge will catapult her next book onto the lists! Or at least make her very popular at parties.

NINC Bulletin Board

NINC Bulletin Board Compiled by Kit Frazier / kitfrazier@yahoo.com

Promote NINC, promote yourself—post in NINC Blog

If you haven't registered, please do so at <http://www.NINC.com/blog/>. Fill out the profile, then email Patricia Rosemoor at: Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com.

Around the NINC Web:

Autumn is right around the corner, and so is the NINC Conference, which starts Thursday, October 25, with the September 30 registration deadline looming—check the web often for new details <http://www.NINC.com/conferences/2012/>!

Need a resend of e-Nink? Or do you want to ask a plotting question of a lawyer, private investigator, or forensics expert? Or comment on an article we've run?

Contact the editor, [Marianna Jameson](mailto:Marianna.Jameson), at Marianna@MariannaJameson.com and she'll forward your question and print the answer in the next issue.

Recreate-tional Writing

BY MARIANNA JAMESON

I write eco-techno thrillers in which nefarious corporate bigshots, tortfeasors, and political animals discover that messing with Mother Nature never works out well. What can I say? At heart, I've always been a green weenie.

I clearly remember the first Earth Day—on Wednesday, April 22, 1970 our entire third-grade class at Our Lady of You Are Not Here To Have Fun spent the morning fashioning trash buckets out of those small white cardboard “Chinese food” containers and decorating them. Then we were released into a gloriously sunny but chilly spring afternoon to pick up trash all around the perimeter of the school. What's not to like about that? Art all morning and freedom all afternoon! We could get dirty and not get in trouble! (Kinda sounds like the same rules for writing, doesn't it?)

I've always loved planting things and watching them grow. I reduce, reuse, and recycle. I use all those great canvas bags from writing conferences to haul my organic food home from farmers' markets. So when I was reorganizing my office last year and realized that I had nearly three full cases of ARCs that I no longer wanted, I decided to do something environmentally conscious with them.

I considered it carefully. I didn't want to toss them in the recycle bins because I figured someone would fish them out and sell them. I didn't want to donate them because the books are long-since out, and some are out of print. And I certainly wasn't going to toss them into the trash to add to a land fill.

A friend who'd just completed her Master Gardener certification suggested I compost them. Composting wasn't something I'd considered, primarily because in my marriage the subject of compost is like the subject of finances or gambling or other bad habits is in other marriages: a major sore spot. My husband believes compost heaps are an eyesore (but beauty is in the eye of the beholder!), that they smell (yes, like earth!), and that they attract vermin (only the good, bug-like kinds that like rotting things!).

And, okay, I confess: we had a bad experience with compost heaps not long after we'd moved into our house in Connecticut 12 years ago. I discovered a many-years-old compost heap in the far back corner of the yard. At first, I was thrilled—I had my own stockpile of black gold *and* the perfect opportunity to show my husband just how wrong he was. I ask you: Does life get better than that?

I hired some local guys with a start-up landscaping company to clear out some of the non-composting things there, like old gutters and siding, Christmas tinsel, and broken Pabst Blue Ribbon bottles, and to help me turn over and aerate my new stash of gardeners' crack. About half an hour later, the guys and I jumped back in collective horror as a large family of New York City subway-sized (possum-sized, for the Southerners reading this) *RATS* came racing out of their tunnels and across my yard. Turns out, the multi-story subterranean space beneath that nice, warm, *old* compost heap had been the perfect home for them. For decades, probably. That's what the exterminator who set the breadbox-sized traps throughout my yard two hours later told me, anyway.

That evening, my husband was tight-lipped and frowny. I took a voluntary vow of silence on the topic of compost. Peace reigned in the household. (And even though I never saw another rat, I never told the neighbors.)

Then my gardener friend persuaded me to give composting another try. She knew the ARCs represented times that were less than happy days in my career and I needed to exorcise the memories (she said). And books were made from paper, after all, and paper came from trees. I could plant new trees that would trap carbon (she said) and I'd feel better about reading all those frightening research reports from NASA and

NOAA about greenhouse gases since I'd be doing something for the planet. And (she reminded me) I'd been talking about putting in a bed at the far side of the patio since I moved in. Besides (she pointed out over our second glass of wine), I lived in Texas now, where the soil and the critters were different. There would be no vermin *here*, except for the villains in those rotting pages.

So a few days later, about an hour after my husband left for one of his business trips to Europe and I was sure he was already through security and not likely to come home to pick up something he forgot, I hauled out a huge Tupperware tub, tossed all the ARCs in it, filled it with water, and let it sit in the sun. Then I drove to a garden center to order many, many cubic yards of bark mulch to hide the evidence.

I intended for that literary spa treatment to last for a few hours, but the slick paper covers wouldn't come off after such a short soak, or even a slightly longer one, and I knew all that colored ink and lamination gunk wasn't what I wanted in my flower bed. I mean, what if I wanted to plant vegetables there some day? Or grape vines, in karmic thanks?

Several days passed and my children were first fascinated and then repelled by the cloudy, yellow, bubbling, viscous solution the water had become. By now, I was wondering just what I was going to do with it. The garbage haulers probably wouldn't take it even if I could manage to drag it to the curb, and the city would probably classify it as hazardous waste if I called for a special pickup. I was afraid to touch it, frankly, and was getting a bit panicked. The charming thought-turned-science experiment was right outside my back door and the kids had to pass in front of it to take a swim or get to their play set. The pulpy mass seemed to be breathing if you looked at it from a certain angle, and the sides of the tub were beginning to bulge—and the tub wasn't even covered.

It *needed* to go. Finally, it was the thought of having to explain to my imminently returning husband the presence of all that uncheap mulch sitting at the top of the driveway combined with the rather urgent pungency of books dissolving on my patio that made me get moving. That he would not understand my predicament would be an understatement. That he would be unsympathetic would be a bigger one.

I bought some heavy-duty rubber gloves, got a large bucket, and began separating the covers (still completely intact and legible, mind you) from the books.

I hauled about 10 buckets of sodden, heavy books across the patio and laid them all open-faced to the sky across the area I'd earmarked for my new bed, then hauled wheelbarrow upon wheelbarrow of mulch to cover them. When asked later that evening, I admitted to Hubby what was underneath all the mulch. (He might have been jet-lagged, but he's no dummy. I suspect he was only being polite by asking.) Hubby thought about it for a moment in silence, and then suggested that if Pam ever suggested putting in a pond, I should probably switch to drinking beer when I'm with her.

I waited. Last summer's sun was harsh, bright, and unrelenting, the air was dry, we had no rain. With high water prices and tight watering restrictions due to the worst drought in 60 years, Hubby glowered when I went out to water the mulch. Wind, of which we had plenty, would shift the bark around and sometimes I'd see telltale flaps of white pages sticking up like little flags. Were the books surrendering to Nature, I wondered, or were they begging me to rescue them and give them a decent burial in some natural woodland since there was no noble rot going on underneath all that mulch? I gently covered them over. And I waited some more.

This spring, after our mild winter and a few blessedly rainy weeks, I went outside and tentatively swept back some mulch. And then some more. I grabbed my trowel and sunk it into...fresh, new earth. Dark, rich, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil teeming with fat earthworms.

It had worked. I'd reused, recycled, repurposed, and *recreated* my ARCs! The angst was exorcised. My black-hearted villains had morphed into black gold. I had my flower bed...and the last word.

Although her full-time job these days is the gentle art of writing novels that keep people up at night, Marianna keeps her imagination churning by freelancing as an analyst in the corporate security and intelligence worlds. Her next thriller, Resurrection Island, will be released in October. Her website is www.MariannaJameson.com

Not Your Usual Writing Advice

By JoAnn Grote



Photo by Sabrina Ingram

Using Passion

“Change reality; don’t abandon it.”

— Rita Mae Brown

Humans often become passionate about things that anger or hurt them. Perceived injustice toward one’s self or others, betrayal, loss, and grief can result in the kind of deep rage and pain that causes passion. That rage and pain can exhaust us emotionally and physically, or send adrenaline spiraling through us. Our focus is dragged from other areas of our lives to this one debilitating issue. It derails our creativity, sometimes for months or even years.

I believe it is in the normal course of things that injustice, betrayal, loss, and grief pull us away from the everyday elements that make up our lives for examination and healing. However, if this process is prolonged, it can become injurious to our emotional and physical states, to our relationships and to our careers.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, in the audio version of *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, explains, “The conduit that carries creativity also carries passion.” No wonder our creativity dies when our lives are pulled off-center by extremely hurtful experiences; the creativity conduit is filled with pain. The cause of that passion to which Estes refers can also be “an age-old anger, a historical anger.” She encourages that the rage “is a part and a piece of your history that will probably give rise to a lot of your ideas that are creative and whole and wild.”

Of course, deep pain, grief, and anger take much time and emotional work to heal, and we often need the help of others such as psychotherapists. I do not want to say the path is easy. But we can find a gift in it all if we combine creativity with the painful or anger-filled passion to cleanse the creativity conduit, to help ourselves and help others.

As I’ve mentioned in previous columns, many of my stories deal with heroines and heroes who rescue children, especially by raising abandoned or orphaned children. I’ve felt a passion for helping children who lost their parents since I was a child. A parent walking away from a child is an action that is unfathomable to me. (I am not talking about putting a child up for adoption; I am speaking about abandonment.) Perhaps this results from my brother’s death when I was 10. Even then I thought that if it was so painful to lose a brother, it must be worse to lose one’s parents at a young age. Or perhaps the passion is a result of my parents raising two of my cousins. Whatever the reason, that passion has become intertwined with my creativity, a core value presented in many of my stories.

Mary Kay Ash retired from a sales career in the middle of her life. She’d raised three children as a single mother while selling products for firms such as Stanley Home Products, during which time she experienced a lot of discrimination because she was a woman. Upon retirement, she began making notes with the intent to write a book on how to run a company based on principles she believed in, principles that she did not see in practice. Mary Kay hoped that writing the book would help her heal from the anger of years of discrimination. She spent a month working on the book. Then an idea popped into her mind. Why not put her theory into practice instead of into a book? That spark was the beginning of Mary Kay, the enormously successful beauty product company, a company built to empower women, a company that rose from Mary Kay’s anger over unfair treatment because she was a woman. I don’t know whether she ever wrote the book she started,

but you can read the story of Mary Kay's life in her biography, which has continued her quest to empower women.

Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way* and other books on the writing life, has described how she funneled her anger and pain over a divorce into her writing. That isn't the only way she's used anger in her work. "Julie hates bullies' has been a determining factor in my writing career," she wrote in *Walking in This World*. "Arguably, my book *The Artist's Way* was written from the same protective impulse as punching out the schoolyard bully. Artist abuse makes me furious...so I did something about it."

As authors, we are accustomed to using things that happen in our lives and the lives of those close to us as story elements. Yet sometimes when we experience extremely difficult situations, the creativity is clogged by our experience, as noted above.

One way various NINC members have released anger of betrayal by a former spouse, boss, friend, agent or editor is by making the offending person a murder victim in a story—under an assumed name, of course.

NINC member Debra Holland recently "had two very upsetting emotional experiences—one with a happy ending, and one that's not. As part of my way of processing my feelings, I've found myself allowing the motions to generate story ideas."

Debra took her Shetland Sheepdog, Oreo, to spend a day with her boyfriend, Don, on his boat that is kept on a channel leading to the ocean. "Don was reluctant about bringing Oreo, saying we didn't have water wings for her. I dismissed his concerns. Oreo hates water, and I had no fears that she'd go in.

While Don was parking the car, Debra took Oreo to the boat, left Oreo there and headed back to use the restroom on shore. When she returned to the boat, Oreo was gone.

"Terrified, I started calling her, searching through the boat. Then I climbed off the boat and ran up the dock, thinking she'd made her way to land. Don arrived, and he immediately started looking for her on the water. On the verge of tears, I called her name over and over, a note of panic in my voice. I asked some people walking by if they'd seen her. Finally, someone yelled out from the other dock across from us, "She's in the water!" I ran to the edge of a boat slip, and saw her swimming in the area between the two docks. She was obviously tired, but headed toward the sound of my voice. I'd never been so relieved in my life.

"For a few minutes, all I could think of was how haunted I would have been if I'd lost her through my own carelessness. My life would have changed, and it would have taken me a long time to get over the guilt and pain of losing my baby. But since I'm a crisis counselor, I know better than to indulge in those kind of thoughts for long. I forced myself to dwell on the fact that Oreo was safe.

"I've learned as a writer, no experience, and especially no emotion, is ever wasted. Before I drifted off to sleep, with a damp dog pressed against my leg, I promised myself that I'd find a way to use my intense emotions in a story. Since my books are set in 1890s Montana, an ocean isn't conveniently nearby. But rivers are."

Soon after Oreo's scary swim, tragedy hit Debra's family. "My cousin, Mindy, lives with me. On June 11, her 20-year-old daughter, Tanya, was hit by a car and killed. You can imagine the shock and grief our family is experiencing, both individually and collectively.

"My emotions are too raw and painful to pour into a story at this time. But before Tanya's death, I was already toying with a short story about parents who lose their daughter, then later receive a special Christmas gift. In the last week, I've had a few thoughts about making the character of the daughter more like Tanya, and I certainly will be able to draw from my own grief when I write the story.

"Somehow the thought that Tanya will be my muse brings me comfort—perhaps because it's a way to immortalize her. She definitely would have liked that. This story will be an act of love from me to her...and perhaps from her to me. I also intend to dedicate the story to her: Tanya Lauralynn Freed, 1992-2012.

"I can't write Tanya's story yet. But I will."

As Debra's experience shows, sometimes we need time to heal from a situation to a point where using the experience in our writing can continue that healing.

During an especially painful experience in my own life, I used a journal to record my emotional journey. The journal helped me through the healing process, and was a record for later when I would have the emotional distance to use the experience in story.

Continued on page 17 ▶



WRITING is TAXING

By Diane Kelly

The Per Diem Option

Travel expenses can really add up for an author. What's more, keeping up with all of those pesky meal receipts can be daunting, especially for long or busy trips. If you're like me, you may have returned from a business trip unable to find a receipt you tucked away somewhere, most likely the bar tab from a particularly fun conference.

The good news is that you have an easy option for your business meals while traveling. Tax law allows you to use a standard meal allowance in lieu of your actual expenses.

The standard meal allowance is known as the "Meals and Incidental Expense" rate, or "M&IE" rate, for short. An M&IE study is conducted every three to five years and rates are adjusted based on the restaurant pricing data compiled. Current M&IE rates range from \$46 to \$71 per day.

The standard rate includes all costs for food, beverages, tips, and taxes. Therefore, you are not entitled to a separate deduction for drinks, gratuities, or taxes.

The standard meal allowance rates can be found in various places online depending on the location of your travel. For travel within the continental U.S., you can find the per diem rates on the U.S. General Services Administration website at www.gsa.gov. For travel outside the continental U.S., the per diem rates can be found on the U.S. Department of Defense website at <http://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/site/perdiemCalc.cfm> or on the U.S. Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/travel/>.

If you travel to more than one location in a given day, use the rate for the location where you spend the night or stop to rest.

If you do not find your travel location listed, check to see if there is a stated rate for the county in which the city or town is located, and use the county's rate. You can visit the National Association of Counties' website at www.naco.org to determine which county a destination is located in. If neither the city nor county are listed, the standard CONUS location rate applies to that location. The standard CONUS M&IE rate is currently \$46 for meals.

What if your destination is outside the U.S., but it takes you a day or more to travel across the U.S. as you go to and from the foreign destination? The rules state that the foreign travel rates do not apply until your mode of travel has left its last scheduled stop within the U.S. The foreign rates would cease to apply once you have made your last scheduled stop in the foreign location.

There are a few caveats, of course.

Just as we are entitled to deduct only 50 percent of our actual meal costs, only 50 percent of the standard meal allowance is deductible. If you use the GSA's M&IE rate to determine the cost of your meals, remember to claim only half of the rate as your deduction.

You cannot use the full M&IE allowance on your first and last days of travel. You have the option of using 75 percent of the M&IE rate on those days or using a consistent method that is in accordance with reasonable business practices. If you use the 75 percent option, your deduction would thus be 37.5 percent of the M&IE allowance (50 percent deductible amount multiplied by 75 percent of the M&IE rate).

If your travel does not require an overnight stay away from home but you are away from your usual workplace longer than 12 hours, you are entitled to treat 75 percent of the M&IE rate as your cost of meals.

If you attend a conference or meeting in which some meals are provided for you, you must reduce your standard meal allowance by the amount that applies to the meal provided. A breakdown of the M&IE allow-

ance between breakfast, lunch, dinner, and incidental costs can be found at <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/101518>.

While the standard meal allowance can provide a larger deduction to those who are somewhat frugal, those who prefer more lavish meals might be better off computing their deduction using their actual expenses.

If you use the standard meal allowance, you must still keep records to document the time, place, and business purpose of your travel. However, you can easily substantiate the time and place of your travel with your transportation and lodging records.

Finally, the GSA lodging rate cannot be used by self-employed people to compute their lodging expenses. So although we are permitted to use the GSA rate for our meals, we must use the actual cost for hotel expenses.

For more details, see IRS Publication 463, *Travel, Entertainment, Gift, and Car Expenses*.

Wishing you safe travels and *bon appétit!*

Diane Kelly is a CPA/tax attorney and the author of the humorous Death and Taxes romantic mystery series from St. Martin's Press.

Not Your Usual Writing Advice

Continued from page 15 ▶ We can't avoid difficult times in our lives, or the fact that hard experiences can clog the creativity conduit for a time. But eventually the creativity that is inherent in our lives can be used to continue that healing. As writers, we have an edge over most people in that we already have a creative outlet to use for that healing work.

To learn more about Dr. Debra Holland's work and writing, visit her website at <http://drdebraholland.com>.

JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 38 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children's nonfiction. Contact her at jaghi@rconnect.com.

Business Briefs

Penguin's Parent Pearson Purchases Vanity Publisher

Pearson has announced that it will buy Author Solutions, Inc. for \$116 million in cash. Founded in 2007, Bloomington, Indiana-based Author Solutions has published 190,000 books by 150,000 authors and reported revenues of \$100 million last year.

A press release from Pearson calls the acquisition an "opportunity for growth" and states that Penguin Group will gain "expertise in online marketing, consumer analytics, professional services and user-generated content" while the vanity publisher "will benefit from Penguin's design, editorial and sales skills, and its strong international presence." Pearson is also using terms such as "curated self-publishing" to describe what the new venture will produce.

This isn't Penguin's first foray into self-publishing. A venture launched in November 2011 through its online community Book Country drew criticism from self-publishing guru J.A. Konrath over royalty rates.

GalleyCat/paidContent

The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



Blonde Trifecta

“It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

— George Eliot

I’ve been time traveling lately. As you might imagine, it has made me both nostalgic and disoriented.

This immersive journey to my own past has occurred via the epic task (begun in January 2011 and still ongoing) of copy editing (as well as formatting, converting, and packaging) all my old books and stories for e-book release in my self-publishing venture, *Blonde Trifecta*.

The name of my e-publishing endeavor is a visit to my origins. As the blonde baby daughter of a horseracing fanatic in Chicago, I was named after the thoroughbred Laura Lee, a stakes loser at Arlington the summer I was born. I made the mistake of sharing this obscure fact about my birth with my roommates one drunken night in college, 20 years later. From then on, when I was climbing the endless flight of steps at our apartment complex to reach our dwelling at the very top of that hill, I would hear, wafting out of the windows of our apartment and floating down the stairs for the amusement of the entire student village: “And it’s Laura Lee in the homestretch, ahead by a nose! This plucky filly has run a great race, but she looks like she’s starting to flag in homestretch!” And so on.

There’s a *reason* I never use my middle name. Not even on legal documents.

At any rate, for those of you who were *not* raised by racing fans, a “trifecta” is when you correctly bet on win, place, and show at the track; it’s a triple victory at the cash window. Ah, may the gods of chance grant that my e-business emulates its namesake!

When I started this venture, the logistics of self-publishing (choosing software, learning to format and convert manuscripts to e-books, learning to create covers, figuring out how the online vendors and their systems worked, making pricing decisions, etc.) were daunting enough that I deliberately choose to start by releasing some of my more-recent backlist books—manuscripts that I knew were in pretty good shape and only needed a quick once-over. My first half dozen e-books were all projects I knew pretty well; working with them was like a good training run on a short, smooth track.

Since then, though, my progression on the rest of my body of work has led me on a journey through novels I barely remember writing, as well as books whose publishing process was such a demoralizing nightmare for me back in the day that I felt anxious about revisiting them now.

One of the projects I’d been dreading ever since I began self-publishing my backlist was a massive fantasy trilogy I wrote over a period of several years. The first book was written in an archaic word-processing program that made cleaning up the manuscript a Herculean task, even apart from the editing that the three books would need. Additionally, the trilogy needed new front- and end-matter, including maps and glossaries. And that’s just the practical stuff!

Add in the emotional baggage, and I knew that e-publishing this massive opus would be my personal Belmont. (For those of you not raised by racing fans: The track at Belmont is considered the true test of champions, demanding stamina, strategy, and true grit.)

The books in question had started off as a very promising new career direction. But things soon spiraled into disappointment and frustration, followed by rage, despair, depression, and a bevy of stress-induced illnesses. I was a bad fit with the publishing house and a *terrible* fit with the editor, both of which were chosen by my then-agent—who repeatedly dismissed my requests to be reassigned to a different editor and/or marketed to another house. Ever since proofreading the galleys on the final book to get it into production back then, I never again wanted to look at these novels. This was the track where I had sustained severe injuries, and I was spooked about going back over that ground.

As it turned out, though, this trip into the worst part of my professional past was healing and cleansing (two words I rarely use). Free of the former professional associations which had made these novels such a nightmarish experience for me, I discovered something I'd totally forgotten (in part because it was certainly never acknowledged to me by anyone I was working with back then): These are, in fact, really good books.

In a distant, objective way, I had known that. Despite the absence of enthusiasm (or even civility) from agent, editor, and publisher, these books earned out well, received starred reviews, and made “Year’s Best” lists. But having seen this material consistently treated as an albatross rather than an asset by my various professional associates...ensured that the unmitigated misery of the publishing process was all I could recall, for years afterwards, when thinking of these novels.

So giving the MSs a line-edit for reissue, writing all-new front- and end-matter for the books, and repackaging them made them *mine* again, and finally liberated them from those destructively negative memories.

Meanwhile, I have found that editing my earliest books (12 category romance novels) has been an educational visit to my younger self. For example, years later, I can see clearly how unsuited I was to writing category romance and why I eventually got dumped by the publisher. At the time, though, I couldn’t understand why so many of my proposals were rejected by the house or why my sales were flat. But it’s so obvious to me now, in revisiting these forgotten manuscripts, that I was very interested in writing comedy, action, plot, big multi-character scenes, familial conflict, ambition, and friendship...and only marginally interested in writing romance and sex. In my old Silhouettes, the romance often reads like a subplot taking up too much space, rather than being the driving force of the story.

I can also see now that I mostly chose to write heroes and heroines who would go on to have fruitful, fulfilling lives *whether or not* they got together with each other. But “they’ll both be okay even if this relationship doesn’t work out” wasn’t the emotional experience that most readers were seeking in this subgenre. Moreover, most of my love scenes and sexual tension moments in these old romances read to me now like paint-by-numbers stuff. I was writing what was required in those scenes and including them as frequently as I was told to include them, but it wasn’t what I was focused on or really interested in.

The two editorial notes I got over and over, on every single manuscript, during my dozen books in category romance were, “Add more sex,” and “Add more sexual tension.” To me, it always seemed the books were already so chock full of longing gazes, aroused hormones, and sexual consummation that there was hardly any room left for the *story*—so how could the manuscripts always need still *more* of that stuff?

On the basis of that previous sentence, I assume you can see—more clearly than *I* did at the time, certainly—that I was in the wrong place as a writer and not destined to remain there for long. I was dumped after my twelfth category romance, sporadically managed to sell a couple of single-title romances, and moved into the fantasy genre before long—where I have stayed ever since, being much better suited to it.

However, my old category novels are cute books, even if they miss hitting the “sweet spot” of romance fiction, and I’ve been enjoying this trip down Memory Lane—where I often, upon opening one of these manuscript files, have no real idea what the plot is or how the conflict will be resolved.

What I particularly see in this progression of my earliest books is that I was gradually starting to grow into the writer I would later become—in much the way that (I hope) I will look back on my current work, 20 years from now, and see how I am now gradually growing into the writer I will become by then. Visiting my past via these old romance manuscripts, I observe my former self increasingly experimenting with the ▶

things that eventually became my stomping ground, such as action, comedy, plot reversals, supernatural elements, big casts of colorful characters, and so on.

Looking back over the furlongs I've already covered, I can see that I was a plucky filly at the starting gate, and after some rough years in training, I eventually found my footing and hit my stride. I'm still a long way from the homestretch, but I'm having a decent run and gaining ground, and I have high hopes of finishing in the money.

Laura Resnick writes the Esther Diamond fantasy series for DAW Books, and her 2012 releases are Disappearing Nightly and Polterheist. Her backlist e-books are available from most e-vendors and are all listed on her website at LauraResnick.com.

NINC Bulletin Board

JOT: Just One Thing . . . volunteers needed

If you're interested in seeing that we have industry guests again every Wednesday please Contact Patricia — Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com

Business Briefs

Harlequin Sued By Authors

A small group of authors has filed a class-action suit against the romance behemoth Harlequin Enterprises and two of its European subsidiaries over e-Book royalties. The lawsuit, which seeks a jury trial, alleges that Harlequin owes the authors additional royalties for eBooks sold under the terms of contracts signed between 1990 and 2004. The purpose of the suit, according to lead attorney David B. Wolf is to force Harlequin to "pay authors what they are legally due" according to the contracts they signed. Present and former Harlequin authors who wrote under contracts signed between 1990 and 2004 are encouraged to examine the contracts to determine if they qualify as members of the plaintiff class named in the suit.

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