



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



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VOLUME 34 : NUMBER 7  
JULY 2023

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# *Nink* July 2023

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# President's Voice

*By Celeste Barclay*



Many times, we wonder what the secret power is behind authors who seem to be on a direct escalator to success. Do they have unparalleled storytelling skills? Maybe. Were they in the right place at the right time? Maybe. Do they know the right people? Maybe. Do they have money to spend on their small business? Maybe. The answers to these questions vary, but the one common denominator is usually marketing savvy. Anecdotally, many of the authors I've met who are highly successful come from a marketing background. They've already been trained to persuade people to buy. Some highly successful authors intuitively understand human behavior and tap into it to connect with readers. Regardless of our training or innate skills, we can all grow our business by implementing tried-and-true practices.

One such practice we talk about all the time is the newsletter. We know we need one (most of the time). We don't always know what to put in them, but we know they're a good idea. We talk about how we own our newsletter lists. That if anything ever happened to our most beneficial social media platform, we'd still have a way to reach readers. We talk about having a captive audience through our newsletter. These are all true. But why are they true? It goes deeper than the obvious.

When we utilize our newsletter, we're engaging in direct marketing. This concept's name is fairly self-explanatory. We send personalized content directly to our readers. When we run ads, we can only narrow down our target so much. We can study and test our keywords and demographics, but we're still casting our comparatively small net into a massive ocean. Direct marketing allows us to target very specific audiences. This is cost-effective. Plain and simple. Just because the name is obvious, and it's a simple concept, doesn't mean you should underestimate its power.

AMS clicks are getting harder to come by as the price rises exponentially. The same keywords that cost 15 cents U.S. (about the same in Euros) five years ago, now cost more than \$1 (a few cents less in Euros). There might be a keyword I'm willing to spend big on, but I'm not willing to do that on all the keywords. It's not sustainable. Sure, there's the adage: you must

spend money to make money. I agree. But now we're seeing this concept blend with the other adage: go big or go home. Spend big to make big isn't a sound financial practice for most authorpreneurs. The ROI isn't there. Even for authors who have the means to spend high five and six figures per year on ads, many are noticing that their net income isn't what it used to be. The cost of ads is cutting into their profits.

A significant number of people see success with Facebook ads, and some prefer them to AMS ads. But Facebook can be unpredictable with their enforcement of community standards and recalcitrant in their accountability to their users. They frequently refuse to inform ad managers of exact violations, nor do they easily allow ad managers to request a review or petition for reinstatement of closed ad accounts. One day your account is doing well, and the next it's shut down. For the longest time we couldn't attribute ad clicks to conversions and purchases off the site. We could correlate increased sales to ads getting plenty of clicks. However, correlation is not causation. We could only make our best guess, and it often meant running Facebook and AMS ads concurrently made it difficult to measure Facebook ad success.

How do we temper the ballooning cost of ads? How do we combat unexpected account shutdowns? We harken back to the good old days of direct marketing. We still see direct marketing every time we get the mail and find twenty different flyers and postcards in the stack. What happens to most of those? In my house, they go in the recycling bin. They're often targeted to the neighborhood or income bracket in which someone fits. The segmentation isn't refined enough to send mailers that actually interest me. Just because I own my home doesn't mean I want new windows. However, we as authorpreneurs have access to information that can better segment and personalize our reader outreach because we have access to them on a personal level. We can implement direct marketing strategies that accurately target and segment readers through our newsletter and our social media posts.

#### Direct marketing has very specific advantages:

- Cost efficiency—more stable and reliable.
- Personalized communication—represent your brand exactly how you want.
- Easier buying process through direct links.
- Improves reader loyalty—they feel they know you.
- Increase sales through promos (it could be your newsletter or a paid newsletter site).
- Quick turnaround—no waiting for ads to serve and quick feedback.
- Specific information tailored to you and to them.
- Concise targeting—you know exactly who.
- Increased reach (BookFunnel, Prolific Works, Story Origin, swaps, etc.).
- Easy to manage—no waiting for approval, no trying to conform to obscure regulations, and the ability to immediately make changes.
- Control—you determine the exact messaging, and you make the first move.
- Straightforward—you can make the CTA obvious and specific.

I urge you to do a cost comparison. Take a look at your newsletter annual fee. Take a look at your average annual ad spend, excluding promo sites. Write down the numbers side by side. Next look at your newsletter's open rates. Write down the number or percent of people opening your newsletter beneath the cost of your newsletter. Now write down the actual or estimated number or percentage of your targeted people viewing your ads. Write down your click rates for each. Which is giving you the better ROI? Right now, there's a good chance it's your newsletter. Also consider which one enables you to more easily and accurately track your data? Which one leaves you making guesses (that are hopefully educated)?

You can conduct the same experiment with your social media insights. Compare—or more accurately contrast—how many people see your posts and then engage with them versus your ads. Even with the algorithmic struggles we endure to get our posts into people's feeds, there's a good chance your exposure and engagement rate is still higher than your ads' rates.

By no means am I advocating not using paid ads. I'm not saying that paid ads aren't beneficial. I'm merely suggesting you do the comparison and record the numbers, so they're staring back at you. Doing this allows us to quantify the value of our newsletter rather than vaguely knowing they help. It may reassure you that your newsletter is helping. It may justify your ad spends. It may leave you completely baffled. Any of those may happen, but it will leave you with data you can use to continue strategizing and budgeting.

I'm a huge proponent of data mining social media. Major corporations have companies that do it for them. They collect our banking and credit card use. They collect our social media use. They share information amongst themselves. It's why we get those annoying cookie pop-ups on practically every site. The average authorpreneur doesn't have the same resources to have a large company professionally do it for them. However, we can do a little digging on our own. I'm not suggesting invading anyone's privacy. I'm not suggesting collecting their personal information and sharing it with anyone else.

But I am suggesting you look at people who frequently comment on your social media posts or those of comparable authors. Start looking at demographic and psychographic information. Start creating a picture or profile of these readers. Do the same with your newsletter through polls, and open-ended questions and encouragement to email their responses. From there, tap into their interests. Tap into how, where, when, and why they interact with various people online. What are the patterns you see? Use your newsletter subscribers and your social media followers, who are only a fraction of your total readership, as focus groups. Test things with them directly.

Use this information to tailor your content in your posts and your newsletters, so that it really speaks to them. We can reach them directly, intrigue them, and serve them what they want, which is our books in their hands or on their devices. Doing this gives your readers a sense that you "get" them, that you're just like them, that you're relatable and approachable. You are creating a perception in their minds that's memorable. This doesn't mean become a snake-oil salesperson who lies through their teeth about who they are and what they have to

offer. It doesn't mean present yourself as someone you're not. It means personalize beyond what you can do with paid ads or promo site placements. Use your newsletter and your social media to converse directly with your readers.

How many of you would rather have a text conversation than an actual spoken conversation these days? How many of you would rather know someone is coming over than have them drop by unexpectedly? Using direct marketing allows you to have the equivalent to a text message conversation with your reader who knows you're coming over in advance. They can expect your newsletter on a specific day or how many times a week or month you're going to post. They can have the conversation at their speed with time to consider what they're reading just like we do with texts. It's not a "scroll past and it's gone" experience like with ads.

Resourcefulness is the name of the game right now. We can't control the retailers, and we can't control social media platforms. But we can control creating personalized content that we can use to reach people directly. Using direct marketing is still one of the most powerful and cost-effective methods we have to reach our readership. As many of us tighten our paid advertising purse strings, implementing or improving or increasing our newsletters could be what keeps us relevant and top-of-mind to readers.

As I often do in these pieces, I shall leave you with some questions. Do you use direct marketing? Have you compared the data among your different marketing tools? Are there benefits to using direct marketing that you didn't realize or haven't explored?

We don't exist in a static industry. If we don't consistently reflect and adjust, we will become obsolete authorpreneurs. We may feel like doors and windows are shutting in our faces, but somewhere there are other ones opening. Take a peek. Test them out. Find a marketing path that enables you to reach your goals.

It continues to be an honor and privilege to serve as your president to the premier international organization for professional novelists.

## Reference

Tucker, D. (2022, March 17). *12 Advantages Of Direct Marketing For Your Business*. *60 Second Marketer*. <https://60secondmarketer.com/2022/03/17/12-advantages-of-direct-marketing-for-your-business/>

~Celeste Barclay

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*Celeste Barclay, a nom de plume, lives near the Southern California coast with her husband and sons. Before becoming a full-time author, she was a social studies and English teacher. She holds degrees in International Affairs (BA), Secondary Social Science (MAT), and Political Management (MPS). She channels that knowledge into creating rich historical romances that bring the heat.*

## **About NINC**

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

## **About *Nink***

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

## **NINC Member Benefits**

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

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#).

## **Accessing the NINC Website**

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>

## From the Editor

A new feature in *Nink*

By Harper St. George



In January, I added a new column in *Nink* that would bring you the latest in news from both the traditional and indie publishing world. This was Publishing News. Thanks to the generosity of Jane Friedman who edits The Hot Sheet, a twice monthly roundup of all things publishing, *Nink* has been able to bring you a condensed version of The Hot Sheet every month, which has been specifically tailored to NINC members. It's filled a gap in the newsletter that I think had been missing for some time.

Now I am happy to announce another informational column coming to you from *Nink*. Many members don't realize this, but NINC is a member of the [Authors Coalition of America](#). The ACA is an organization that collects foreign reprographic royalties and either distributes them to creators (title-specific royalties) or uses them to benefit all creators (non-title specific royalties). NINC's ACA rep, Rebecca Zanetti, has agreed to write a quarterly column for *Nink* where she will update members on the organization's initiatives and NINC's involvement with them. She also explains a little more about what the ACA does for the writing community.

Please check out her inaugural column in this issue of *Nink*.

Also in this issue, please find our slate of candidates for open seats on next year's board and next year's nominating committee. Please take a moment to read over the list of candidates and their bios. Voting will start in August.

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*Harper St. George* writes historical fiction romance set in various time periods from the Viking Era to the Gilded Age. Her latest series is *The Gilded Age Heiresses*. She lives in the Atlanta area with her family.





## Registration

It's July, and that means your NINC2023 conference planning team has kicked into high gear. We're happy to report that the preliminary full schedule has been laid out; in addition to our previously announced featured speakers, we've added a list of sponsor and industry guest speakers to our lineup (see below!). Look for the titles of the new workshops to be announced soon on social media and in Ninlink.

While registration is sold out and will not open again this year, we *do* recommend that you encourage your friends who are eligible for NINC membership to **apply now** so that they can be on the list to receive the registration link *next* year for the 2024 conference.

They can [go here](#) to check out the requirements and begin the process of joining the *best* professional fiction author organization in the world!

[Note: Starting with 2024, only NINC members will be able to register for the conference, not verified applicants.]

## Hotel and transportation

Just a reminder, our guest room block at the TradeWinds has been filled.

At this point, the hotel is still honoring our group rate at the RumFish. If you have *not* yet booked your room, please call 800-360-4016 and use group code: NINC

We hope to have an update on transportation between the airport and hotel shortly.

## Programming

The programming team is excited to share that we've added Carrie Elks to the speaker list! Carrie will be presenting a workshop titled Amp Up Your Income with a Personalized Plan.

We're also pleased to announce our confirmed sponsor and industry guest speakers!

- Sabrina Benun, Google Play
- Alice Briggs, *Indie Author Magazine*
- Julie Braunschweiger, B&N Press
- Tara Cremin & Rachel Wharton, Kobo
- Damon Courtney, BookFunnel
- Michael Evans, Ream
- Ricardo Fayet, Reedsy
- Sarah Gilbert & Matt Briel, Lulu
- Clayton Noblit & Emma Boyer, Written Word Media
- Russell Nohelty, Writer MBA
- Bonnie Paulson, Finding Your Indie and Captiva Publishing
- Kate Runde & Stephanie Beard, Podium
- Wayne Stinnett & Sam Hoster, Down Island Publishing
- Cameron Sutter, Plottr
- Kevin Tumlinson, Draft2Digital
- Brad West, Vellum

The general conference schedule as well as the list of announced featured speakers and current sponsors can be found [here](#).

## Sponsorship

Confirmed sponsors joining us this year so far are:

- Amazon: KDP and Kindle Vella
- Barnes & Noble Press
- BookBub
- BookFunnel
- Bookvault
- Down Island Publishing
- Draft2Digital
- Fairy Plot-Mother
- Google Play
- Kobo
- Lulu
- Plottr
- Podium
- PublishDrive
- Reedsy
- SAG-AFTRA

- Vellum
- Writer MBA
- Written Word Media

*Breaking news:* We're happy to confirm that once again, Draft2Digital will be spoiling us all with a karaoke party on Saturday evening! Dan promises that he and the team are brainstorming themes for the event ... stay tuned for more updates on that soon!

Your NINC2023 Conference Team:

- Conference Director: Mel Jolly
- Programming Chair/Assistant Conference Director: Tawdra Kandle
- Assistant Programming Chair: Dylann Crush
- Trad Liaison: Lou Aronica
- Sponsorship Chair: Sarah Woodbury
- Assistant Sponsorship Chair: Hallee Bridgeman
- Registrar: Lisa Hughey
- Assistant Registrar: Stephanie Julian
- Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
- Assistant Hotel Liaison: Tegan Maher
- App Coordinator and Designer: Laura Hayden
- NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley
- NINC After Dark Assistant: Deann Powell



*Tawdra Kandle* is the USA Today bestselling author of over 130 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.



## Hot shots

*Recently in the headlines*

### **Storytel has launched an AI initiative for audiobook narration**

In an exclusive partnership with ElevenLabs, Storytel will develop AI voices tailored to Storytel’s market and offer its customers a new feature called VoiceSwitcher, which will “seamlessly switch between a selection of first-class AI voices.” That feature won’t be available for *all* audiobooks, though—just select ones where perhaps no publishers, agents, or human narrators are involved to object. [Read the press release.](#)

### **HarperCollins and KKR make bids for Simon & Schuster**

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#) (sub required), the two current frontrunners to buy Simon & Schuster are HarperCollins and private-equity firm KKR. HarperCollins has been interested from the start in buying Simon & Schuster; its CEO spoke out against Penguin Random House acquiring S&S before that deal was blocked by the U.S. Department of Justice.

KKR is also a previously interested buyer; it is the owner of OverDrive (a major distributor of ebooks to libraries) and RBmedia. In 2021, it disposed of Audiobooks.com, selling it to Storytel. In 2022, KKR was ranked as the largest private equity firm in the world.

According to the WSJ, second bids are due by mid-July, and a deal could be struck by end of summer. A deal with KKR is seen as more friction-free due to the potential DOJ review of a HarperCollins purchase.

### **Book sales update**

For the week ending June 10, Circana BookScan reports that print unit sales are down 3% compared to 2022. That's still 12% ahead of pre-pandemic sales numbers of 2019.

### **How publishers use data to inform what they publish**

*Publishers love to see authors provide data that offers marketing insights they would otherwise not have*

Authors often worry whether bad numbers—whether that's a small or nonexistent social media following, a poor or mediocre sales track record, or just weak [comparable titles](#)—will affect their ability to land a book deal. A recent U.S. Book Show panel offered both hope and tough love on how such data informs what publishers acquire, plus how to overcome bad numbers, should they exist.

Moderated by agent Regina Brooks, the panel included Peter Hildick-Smith, president of Codex (a research firm serving the publishing industry); Richard Rhorer, vice president and publisher of Simon Element (Simon & Schuster); Christa Desir, editorial director of Bloom Books (Sourcebooks); and David Walter, executive director of BookScan.

**Key questions when thinking about data:** Rhorer said he asks three questions about everything they acquire: (1) Who is the reader? (2) How does this author speak or how are they connected to that reader? (3) Why will this book from this author sell to that reader? "Any data you can share that answers one of those three questions is relevant and can help persuade us to acquire and publish a book."

**Publishers also research authors on their own, seeking data that points to future success.** Desir acquires fiction for Bloom Books, which specializes in working with self-publishing authors and bringing their work into traditional print retail markets. She'll study social media, she'll study Goodreads reviews and overall sentiment. She tries to identify how readers are finding a book or an author: Is it through BookTok? Keyword search? Is the topic trending? And of course she looks at what the authors are doing, particularly how they're engaging their audience. She likes to divide readers into a few tiers—e.g., those just discovering an author versus those who only buy that author. What she most likes to find: an author who clearly has evangelists who go out and not only buy the author's work but tell all their friends.

Hildick-Smith mentioned that when he first researched Colleen Hoover's success through BookTok—before her name was so well-known—he was surprised at what he found. At the time, she didn't have many fans. Rather, readers were discovering Hoover through BookTok evangelists. In fact, many of Hoover's early readers weren't even remembering her name afterward.

**An author's number of "book-buyer fans" is a significant indicator of whether a book will succeed**, said Hildick-Smith. A book-buyer fan is someone who is a fan of the author and a regular book buyer. He said, "It's really important to know that we're in the world of books, and only about one in five adults are book people." Thus, Hildick-Smith gets hired by publishers to come up with an "author equity" score for authors (whether career authors, celebrities, or public figures) that indicates sales potential. Because even if someone has several million social media followers, what percentage of them are, in fact, book buyers? He said that before Tina Fey's memoir, *Bossypants*, released, he was asked to come up with her author equity score, and it turns out she has a book buyer fanbase "to die for. It was bigger than David Baldacci. She was up in the stratosphere." (The book was indeed a major bestseller.)

To offer a counterexample, he mentioned Susan Mallery, one of Harlequin's bestselling authors. "She was losing a lot of readers, and she had a very big Facebook presence," Hildick-Smith said, "but she was attracting them not through her books and her stories, but through lifestyle, cooking." Mallery was very frustrated that when she launched her books, this huge group of fans was not buying. But it turns out they simply weren't book buyers. His advice to authors? "If you're doing a newsletter, if you are doing a website, if you're doing anything to communicate to the broader world as an author, talk about your characters, talk about your expertise and the things that you're writing books about. Then you'll get the book-buyer fans."

**What about authors with poor sales or a small following?** Desir said rather than obfuscate, be up front. "We're going to find [out] one way or another." If it's poor sales, try to explain what happened: Bad cover? Bad luck with the release date? The editor departed? And if the shortfall is related to the author's platform, then the author should explain how they're growing their platform and doing their best to engage their fans and evangelists. "There is always a pathway through," Desir offered as encouragement. Whatever the bad news might be, put it in context and give the publisher a chance to think about what might be done differently. (Desir's colleague in the audience, Deb Werksman, also spoke up, telling the agents in the room to always include sales numbers when a client has published previously. "If I have to chase you for the facts, it actually slows down you getting a substantive answer from me," she said. "It's really a piece of data that nine out of 10 times I don't get from agents. And I must have it. I can't even begin to talk ... without having that.")

**A big limitation of data:** It's not very good at telling you new things that haven't happened before. Walter at BookScan said the data isn't great at predicting the future, like identifying a Colleen Hoover. In fact, Hoover's sales potential was never on their radar, as BookScan had seen a lot of decline in romance generally over a number of years. (Editor's note: Keep in mind that BookScan is focused on analyzing the traditional market, not the self-publishing market!)

**Bottom line:** Echoing Walter's comments, Rhorer said he was there to "sing the praises of intuition." In the two years he's been running Simon Element, he said, "I can't think of one time ... that there wasn't something unique to the author's way of talking about [their] subject, of

connecting emotionally with the subject, that wasn't something that an editor on my team responded to." He praised one of his editors, who "practices her craft really intensely" to produce quality books. "That is always going to be the differentiator for our business, no matter how much we talk about data, no matter how much we like to look to [data] because it's reassuring."

## Links of interest

### *Self-publishing*

**Why authors might not want to use Shopify for direct book sales.** The article discusses the limitations and offers alternative solutions. [Read Monice Leonelle at Author Analyst.](#)

**Kindle Unlimited versus wide is a false debate.** This is a very long business read, but it might allay authors' anxiety that there is a "right" choice. [Read Michael Evans at Subscriptions for Authors.](#)

### *Book banning*

**Free library card for teens.** Is your local or school library removing or limiting access to books? Teenagers anywhere can get access to the Brooklyn (NYC) Public Library offering of 300,000 ebook titles and 200,000 audiobooks. [Sign up here.](#)

### *AI*

**Amazon is using AI to generate summaries of customer reviews.** There has been no announcement yet; users have noticed it through A/B testing. [See Aakash Gupta's Twitter thread.](#)

**Kindlepreneur's book description generator now includes an AI editing option.** Want to see if you can improve your book description at Amazon or other retailers? Kindlepreneur has added an AI tool to its [book description generator](#) to help you make improvements. It's optional.

**How to get good results out of ChatGPT.** This advice comes straight from the horse's mouth (OpenAI, creator of ChatGPT). [Read.](#)

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*Reprinted and condensed from [The Hot Sheet](#). Jane Friedman has 20 years of experience in the publishing industry, with expertise in business strategy for authors and publishers. She's the co-founder and editor of [The Hot Sheet](#), a paid newsletter for authors, and has previously worked for [Writer's Digest](#) and the [Virginia Quarterly Review](#).*

# Beyond Stereotypes

## Writing characters with a chronic illness or disability

By Aggie Blum Thompson



The other day, a friend and I were watching *Monk*, a TV series about a detective who has obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), a condition that, as the character often says, is both a blessing and a curse.

In this episode while investigating a murder, Monk became distracted by a sundial set to the wrong time. He went into the garden to adjust it, much to everyone's annoyance, and in the end that sundial being wrong turned out to be the key to solving the murder. It's a funny show, filled with the foibles of a man who can't pass a lamp without touching it and can only drink one brand of bottled water.

But it was my friend's reaction that interested me.

She laughed, hard. As in, tears came out of her eyes. This was the laughter not only of amusement but also of recognition. My friend has severe OCD, which almost led to her hospitalization and which is now under control thanks to a cocktail of medicine and therapy.

She loves *Monk* because it makes her feel *seen*.

Awareness of illness and disability—both mental and physical—has risen in our society in recent years. This increased visibility and acceptance is long overdue and is a welcome change that more accurately reflects the world we live in. As the mother of a child with special needs, and as someone who lives with an invisible chronic illness—I have a rare kidney disease called FSGS—I am happy to see writers tackling these issues and creating more inclusive fictional worlds. But how can we ensure that our representations of disability and chronic illness in works of fiction resonate as authentic, and not as shallow and clichéd? Here are some tips.



## **Do your research.**

If you are going to write about someone with a disability or chronic illness, it is imperative to have a good grasp of what that condition entails and not just the stereotypes commonly associated with it. Describing a character's behavior unrealistically is a big turn-off for those readers who are familiar with the character's condition. [Christina Consolino](#), author of *Rewrite the Stars*, says she read a number of articles and books about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) before sitting down to write Theo, a character who was affected by it.

"For me, it was more about getting to those stories that allowed me to see Theo as a person and therefore write his voice and story with sympathy. And instead of focusing on a stereotype (for example, that people with PTSD are dangerous or get really angry), I focused my time with Theo elsewhere. I showed him with his family in good, typical scenes so we can see him as a person, though we also see when he has to grapple with his PTSD."

## **Make your character more than her disability or illness.**

There is a movement to use people-first language in the world of disability and chronic illness, as in "Bob has schizophrenia" and not "Bob is schizophrenic." Sometimes that can be unwieldy, but the idea behind it is Bob is more than his disease. Don't make your character's disability or illness the basis of her personality. My friend has OCD, but she is so much more than that. She is a mother, a daughter, an avid paranormal romance reader, an obsessive collector of crystals. Wally Lamb's *I Know This Much is True* tells the story of identical twins, one of whom suffers from paranoid schizophrenia, but it's Lamb's perceptive and nuanced portrayal of the twin who has mental illness that renders him a fully formed person, not merely a collection of stereotypical symptoms.

## **People with disabilities and illnesses don't need to be "fixed."**

Nearly 61 million people in America live with a disability, and another 131 million have a chronic illness. So we are everywhere! We are doctors, teachers, baristas, writers—you name it. And we are not all waiting with bated breath to be "cured." It's insulting to write a character who can only be happy once they have shed their disability or illness. It's a point that [Elissa Dickey](#), an author with multiple sclerosis, tried to convey in her book *Speed of Light*, which features a woman who discovers she has MS.

"Disabled and chronically ill main characters do not need a cure in order to be happy," Dickey said. "Disabled and chronically ill characters deserve a happily ever after, just as they are."

## **Don't give your villains a disability or illness as their only backstory.**

Sure, people with disabilities can be the bad guys, but don't lean into stereotypes of scarred faces, missing limbs, and prosthetic arms to indicate evil. This is a device used with pretty much

every James Bond villain—like Oddjob, who had a cleft palate and was mute. Physical deformity does not equal moral deformity. The same goes for mental health issues, which are complicated and extremely diverse in both symptoms and severity. There are too many books whose antagonists lean into “crazy” as justification for their actions. If you really want to write a villain that has an illness or disability, see tips number one and two.

### **Don't give a character a disability or illness just to move the plot forward.**

There is a difference between a disability or illness being a part of the plot and using it as a plot device. In his brilliant novel *Deaf Sentence*, David Lodge explores how a recently retired linguistics professor handles his encroaching deafness. The issue is handled with sensitivity and humor, while being central to the plot. Contrast that with the movie *Don't Breathe*, in which three friends decide to rob a blind man (that's literally what he's called; he has no name) but are in for more than they bargained for because—tag line—*in the dark the blind man is king*. This man is not a person, he's a plot device.

This list may seem daunting, but in reality the same approach to creating any kind of authentic character can be applied to writing characters with illness or disability. Good writers are empathic and use their imaginative powers to write about all kinds of people who are different from them. And their fictional worlds are better for it.

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*Before turning to fiction, thriller author [Aggie Blum Thompson](#) wrote for newspapers such as *The Boston Globe* and *The Washington Post*. Thompson knows about chronic illness and disability firsthand— she lives with a rare kidney disease called FSGS and is the proud mother of a child with special needs. Thompson lives just over the Washington, D.C., line in Maryland with her husband, two children, a small cat, and a large dog. When not writing thrillers, she can be found puttering around her garden or reading on her porch, a gin and tonic in hand.*

# Books and the Day (Night?) Job

## Finding the balance

By Craig Lancaster



When 2023 dawned, I greeted a new year and new possibilities, the same as everyone. For me, though, it wasn't just an abstract annual exercise of reviewing the year gone by and pinning my hopes on the one coming.

Dec. 31, 2022, marked the end of my tenure as a senior editor at *The Athletic*, the sports journalism site owned by *The New York Times*, and (for now, at least, and probably forever) the end of nearly 30 years as a journalist.

The vast preponderance of my working life has been spent on a schedule that looks nothing like that of a nine-to-fiver. Working nights defined my life. Working weekends was the way of my world. Starting in 2008, I had taken advantage of my odd schedule—days largely free—and written 10 novels and a collection of short stories, a burst of industry that won me loyal readers, some nice awards, and even three halcyon years of living on royalties and nothing else. When that stretch of prosperity faded—I don't have to tell professional novelists how difficult it can be to sustain a book-bound living—back to journalism I went.

On Dec. 31, that structure of my life ended. Lurking just days away—Jan. 9, 2023—was a new career as a data analyst and content specialist. Day shifts. Monday through Friday. Weekends off. Normal-person stuff.

How was I going to do this?

I could have followed any number of role models. Here are a few.

### **Dan Coonan: athletic commissioner by day**

Political fiction author [Dan Coonan](#) is the commissioner and CEO of the Eastern College Athletic Conference, a sprawling group of 220 institutions with members stretching west to Missouri, south to South Carolina, and north to Maine.

Talk about your big jobs.

I've found that I can't write after a full day on the job—more on that in just a bit—but for Coonan, doing so is the answer not only to his literary ambitions but also to his overall health.

"The day job is 'all in,'" he says, "but I really do lose myself in the novel I'm writing, and it is such a wonderful release. Clears my head of the stress and anxiety of the job.

"What I do is write at night. I sleep less as I have gotten older. At about 10 o'clock, as the house gets quiet, I'll pour a cup of coffee and go for an hour and a half to two hours, or a lot more if I'm on a roll.

"I think it is a benefit to me to only go a few hours a day. The next day, in spare moments, I'm reliving all I wrote and getting new ideas about improving the dialogue or the scene in some manner. If I didn't work but wrote three or five hours a day, I'm not confident I'd be able to sufficiently rehash all of that additional writing and improve it each day like that."

### **Taylor Lunsford: managing the stress**

[Taylor Lunsford](#) describes her day job as "a customer retention specialist/mess cleaner for a prominent airline." If you were traveling during the tumultuous holiday season of 2022, with mass flight cancellations amid system issues, pilot shortages, and more, there's a significant chance that Lunsford, or someone doing a job like hers, helped you navigate the problem.

She also has a nascent career as an author, writing about "ordinary people finding extraordinary romances."

Those jobs require her to find the balance within, she says. The day job demands her energies, and she needs those in reserve to be able to write.

"As an empath working in a job that requires a lot of empathy, if I want to get writing done, I have to both refill the creative well and be super disciplined," Lunsford says. "When a major event happens at the day job, the writing definitely takes a back seat, even though a lot of times that's what keeps me sane. Then you add the business of writing (newsletters, press releases, blog posts, etc.) and there's a lot of balls in the air."

### **Todd Keisling: take this job and redefine it**

Bram Stoker-nominated horror author [Todd Keisling](#) has an interesting take on balancing an exterior job and the interior life he needed to build to be a successful author: It didn't work. Not for him, anyway.

As Keisling's professional stature grew—both in finance, the corporate field he pursued, and as an author, the career he yearned for—he found employers who didn't care for the binary definition.

"No boss wants to hear you're just there for a paycheck, you know?" he says. "Even the ones who claimed to be supportive usually backpedaled when it came down to me either choosing my art or choosing the job."

So Keisling eventually made a choice: writing the books and doing ancillary work around

the industry. He is in strong demand as a cover designer and book builder. Like many creative types, he has a Patreon platform. The commitment to being a full-time author, and making that work no matter the struggle, has been worth it, he says.

“Looking back, I think I grew more comfortable with defining myself as a writer first.”

### **It’s about time**

Since my life as a novelist began in 2009, I’ve considered myself fortunate to have a career path that works complementary muscles without infringing on the creativity needed to sustain good fiction. As a journalist, I was mostly an editor. As a data analyst and content specialist, I write and edit research reports and articles. There’s overlap, but the night job (and now the day job) never intruded on the literary pursuits, nor did writing fiction ever invade my other professional space. I’ve also been fortunate that pursuing fiction, being a journalist, and wrangling data fulfill a requirement that I believe is essential to any pursuit we take seriously, whether it’s writing a book or fielding a customer complaint:

It can’t just be what you do. It also must be, on some level, who you are.

But on Jan. 9, 2023, I still faced a new job and a new problem: All those daytime hours I’d previously used to write (and take on freelance editing, and design a print magazine, and ...) were happily spoken for. I knew I’d have no energy for writing in the evening hours. So ... what now?

My elegant solution: I go to bed early and wake up and burn a couple of pre-dawn hours. I agree with Dan Coonan: the short bursts work in my favor, freeing my mind to work below the surface during the hours between writing sessions. I make hay on the weekends, which are suddenly free for the first time in my working life.

On this new schedule, I finished a new novel in February and March. A production of my first full-length play is on the boards for the coming autumn. I’m starting to line out the next novel project.

It’s what we do—Dan Coonan, Taylor Lunsford, Todd Keisling, me, and so many others. It’s who we are.

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*Craig Lancaster is the author of 10 novels and a collection of short stories. He’s a two-time winner in the prestigious High Plains Book Awards and has seen his work recognized by the Montana Book Awards, the Utah Book Awards, the Independent Publisher Book Awards, and others. He lives in Billings, Montana, with his wife (novelist Elisa Lorello), a dachshund named Fretless, and a tuxedo cat named Spatz.*

# Understanding and Fighting Back Against Harassment

By Jim C. Hines



In 2013, a big-name editor at a major sf/f publishing house lost his job after multiple reported incidents of sexual harassment. Among the reports and stories shared around this time was an author who reported that after she signed with this publisher, other writers had quietly warned her about this editor.

She'd signed with them in 2002.

In other words, this editor's harassment wasn't a one-time thing. It wasn't an isolated incident. It was an ongoing problem for more than a decade.

Unfortunately, this isn't unusual. A [2018 study](#) in the U.S. found that, "Nationwide, 81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime."

Social media and other online platforms have opened new channels for harassment. A [2022 White House report](#) notes that, "85% of women and girls globally have experienced some form of online harassment and abuse," and in the U.S., "one in three women under the age of 35—and over half of LGBTQI+ individuals—report experiencing sexual harassment and stalking online."

It's not just sexual harassment. Most LGBTQ Americans have been [targeted for harassment and violence](#). Racial harassment, antisemitism, and other forms of [harassment are rampant](#).

If this is such a widespread problem, why hasn't more been done to stop it? How could that editor get away with it for so many years?

I've worked in and written about sexual violence and harassment prevention and education since the '90s. I quickly learned that most harassers have had a lot of practice. In the case of the aforementioned editor, 10-plus years is a long time to get good at something—and to learn how to get away with it.

## Common tactics include

- **Plausible deniability:** It's always a misunderstanding. An accident. A miscommunication. It was all in fun, and you're overreacting. He's just socially awkward.
  - The goal is to make the targets second-guess themselves, and to keep bystanders or third parties neutral.
- **Selective targeting:** It's funny how people who claim they're just "socially awkward" never harass people with more power. It's always an editor harassing a new author. An established author taking advantage of unpublished writers. An agent targeting a first-time novelist.
  - In other words, it's not awkwardness. It's a deliberate choice to victimize people who are less likely to speak up or fight back.
- **Toeing the line:** Particularly online, harassers know exactly how far they can go without getting reported or banned. (But if you respond and say the wrong word, they'll get you thrown in Facebook jail or the equivalent.)
  - The goal is power and control over the target, to make them feel helpless to do anything.
- **Cultivating character witnesses:** How many times have we seen someone outed as a harasser only to have people pour out of the woodwork to say how nice that person is, or that they've never seen any evidence of bad behavior? This isn't an accident. Harassers deliberately cultivate that image.
  - The goal is, once again, to create doubt when and if their harassment comes out.
- **Anonymity:** As authors and other publishing professionals, we're at a disadvantage online. Our identity is there for everyone to see. Whereas it's easy for harassers to create throwaway accounts to target us.
  - Anonymity is another tactic for avoiding consequences. Even if the harasser gets banned, it's easy for them to create a new fake account.

It doesn't help that society has strong victim-blaming tendencies. Too often when someone talks about being harassed, the first question is, "Why didn't you fight back/scream/kick their ass?" instead of keeping the responsibility on the harassers.

Let's be clear: harassment is not the fault or responsibility of the victim, no matter what you did or didn't do.

Years ago at a convention in Kentucky, I was on an elevator with a group that included a loud, obnoxious, very drunk woman. Her friend kept giving me apologetic looks, and I did my best to ignore the rambling. Then as I was stepping off the elevator, the drunk grabbed my ass.

I remember an initial moment of shock. Next came second-guessing whether that had really happened—maybe someone just bumped into me? In the seconds it took me to process, the elevator had closed. I was left feeling pissed off with nothing I could do about it.

That shock is very normal, and very human. We like to fantasize about how we'd take down the jerks, but real life rarely works that way. We freeze. We second-guess. We worry about our safety.

And there's social pressure to let things slide. "Just ignore it," like my teachers used to say. Women in particular are socialized to be quiet and accept a certain amount of objectification and harassment. If you're Black, raising your voice in the wrong crowd can get you labeled "angry" and "dangerous."

So what do we do? How do we reduce harassment? How do we protect ourselves in our professional spaces and the world?

## **Bystanders**

It's common to second-guess what a target of harassment should or shouldn't have done. Why don't we ask about the people who hear the sexist joke or the inappropriate comment and say nothing?

Bystander intervention is a powerful and effective tool. Sometimes it's as simple as looking the harasser in the eye and saying, "Dude, not cool." If you see someone who looks trapped and uncomfortable in a conversation, check in and ask if they're all right. Or—since they might not feel safe—offer them an escape. "Do you have a second to show me where registration is?"

Harassment isn't limited by gender, race, orientation, or any other factor. But [statistically](#), harassers are more likely to be men, and the [targets are more likely to be women](#). That makes it especially important for us as men to speak against harassment, both in general and when we see it happening. A man might ignore or brush off a protest from a woman, but could be more responsive if called out by another guy.

## **Victims of harassment**

There's no one right way to respond, and every situation is different. Your first priority is your safety. Once you're safe, you'll have to decide what steps to take.

Remember, it's not your fault, and you're not alone. No "misunderstanding" or "mixed messages" gives anyone the right to harass you, and as mentioned before, this is unfortunately very common. The person who harassed you has probably done the same to many others.

Some options include:

- **Document** – It can be helpful to write down what happened. Note when and where and who was involved. If you decide to report, this can be helpful as a reference. It can also help you through the initial shock.
- **Talk to a friend** – Find someone you trust and talk about what happened. There's a tendency to minimize and blame ourselves. A friend can help to reality-check and remind you this wasn't your fault, and it wasn't okay. They can also provide support for whatever else you choose to do.



- **Decide whether to report** – This is your choice, and it's not always easy. Some organizations and groups take reports of harassment very seriously. Others, not so much. One convention I know banned a harasser for life. Another shared an unredacted copy of the complaint with the alleged harasser. (Dear Conventions: Don't do this. Just don't.) How to report will depend on where the harassment took place.
  - Was the harasser a publishing professional? Most publishers and agencies want to know if their staff are behaving inappropriately. Check their website and contact them to ask who you should direct complaints to.
  - Were you at a convention or conference? Many events have a harassment policy with a guide for reporting. If not, talk to staff and ask how to proceed.
  - Did it happen online? See if the platform has a mechanism for reporting harassment. This can be hit or miss in terms of effectiveness. At the very least, take a screenshot and make liberal use of the block button.
  - Should you make a police report? In my experience, the police may not act without a direct threat of violence. In most cases of sexual harassment, I've seen people get better responses from reporting to event organizers or employers. On the other hand, if you're dealing with a stalkery fan or you feel that your safety is at risk, contacting the authorities may be the way to go.

## All of us

It's important to continue the conversation. The #MeToo hashtag didn't magically end harassment. The more of us who understand and pay attention to the problem, the more likely there will be bystanders to intervene. The more that organizations recognize harassment as a serious issue, the more likely they are to put policies in place for reporting and prevention.

It's a widespread, ongoing problem, but it's one we can and should fight. Together.

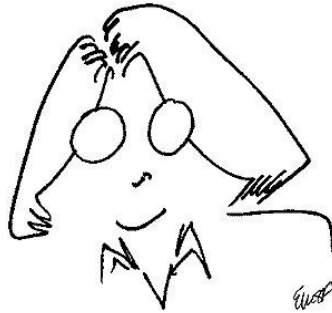
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*Jim C. Hines has worked as a volunteer sexual assault counselor and as the outreach coordinator for a domestic violence shelter. He's also the author of the Magic ex Libris series, the Princess series of fairy tale retellings, the humorous Goblin Quest trilogy, and the Fable Legends tie-in Blood of Heroes. He won the 2012 Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer. His latest novel is Terminal Peace, book three in the humorous science fiction Janitors of the Post-Apocalypse trilogy. Jim currently lives in mid-Michigan with his family.*

# Red Herrings and Plot Details

## How to keep track of them and not leave them hanging

By Elizabeth MS Flynn



In fiction, the term “red herring” is a technique designed to distract the reader by introducing misleading information. It’s a false clue, meant to deceive, before the truth is revealed.

Take a look at your latest story. Have all your plot twists been resolved? Do you have any red herring plot threads that you overlooked? There’s nothing more frustrating than finishing your book, tweaking every subplot, only to have your readers ask about a plot thread you’d forgotten about. Oops!

How can you avoid that bit of embarrassment? You can write and never show your work to anybody else, but rather than go to that extreme, here are some ways to keep track of those pesky plot threads.

### Origins and examples

William Cobbett, a journalist, is credited with originating the term “red herring” in 1807. He criticized the press for prematurely reporting Napoleon’s defeat, and compared that act to using strong-smelling, smoked red herrings to distract hunting dogs. He accused the press of intentionally distracting the public from other events that were occurring.

Some examples? First of all, there’s Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s red herrings range from simplistic to complex. In “The Final Problem,” Holmes receives a note that claims a doctor is required elsewhere, and Dr. Watson runs off to help, leaving Holmes to face off with his archenemy, James Moriarty, alone.

Then there's a language red herring. In the novel *A Study in Scarlet*, Inspector Lestrade discovers the word "Rache" written on a wall at the scene of a murder. Lestrade assumes the victim must have started to write the name "Rachel" but couldn't finish, but Holmes knows that "rache" means "revenge" in German. Later, Holmes realizes that it's a ruse. "Rache" is a double red herring, because it initially misleads Sherlock the way it was meant to, but it also misleads Lestrade because he doesn't speak German. This red herring allows for many wrong trails. Of course, it's harder to get away with this kind of thing these days because it's too easy to bring up a translation app—but it has to occur to your characters to do so.

In Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, there's another good example of a linguistic red herring in the form of a monogram on a handkerchief—you and I know it as an "H," but in the story it was actually a Cyrillic "N."

Elizabeth Peters did something similar with a double red herring in *The Seventh Sinner*, wherein the victim traced out a Roman numeral seven (VII) as he lay dying, only for Jacqueline Kirby, who is the detective of the story, to realize later that it didn't refer to a number, but something else. The story takes place in Rome, so the clue makes perfect sense—in context.

Something a little more modern are the Harry Potter books. JK Rowling peppered red herrings throughout the series, starting with the claims that Harry is the Chosen One and Severus Snape is a bad guy. My husband and I discussed the use of red herrings in both the movie versions and the books. My husband was of the opinion that the hints to Snape's true character weren't as well salted or red-herringed, so to speak, as Harry's non-Chosen One status, but Snape wasn't the main character, either, although he was a major one throughout the series. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, on the other hand, Sirius Black's true character was hinted at in a classic red herring technique before he was revealed to be a good guy.

And then there's Charles Dickens. He peppered red herrings plenty through his tales, and there's no better place you can see that than in *Great Expectations*. Our poor but honest hero, Pip, runs into an escaped convict and is coerced into helping him get free from his shackles. In a red herring, Pip is later invited to visit the wealthy Miss Haversham, and later still learns that he's going to be educated and brought up in the world but isn't told who's paying for it. He concludes that it's the rich lady—but it's only years later that he finds out that, nope, it's the convict he helped, who's been helping him all along.

Sometimes the red herrings aren't subtle, nor are they meant to be, and again use another language for a clue. In *The DaVinci Code*, Dan Brown establishes a villain named Manuel Aringarosa. This is a big, fat hint if you know Italian, because *aringa* means "herring" and *rosa* means ... you can guess. This is another example of a linguistic red herring, so what this tells *me* is that it's useful to know bits of other languages.

Even Agatha Christie could be gleefully unsubtle. In what may be the best-known murder mystery, her story "And Then There Were None" literally mentions "red herring" in the nursery rhyme that echoes how the victims are killed off. It's practically a big arrow that points to something being fishy (if you'll pardon the saying).

## Tracking your red herrings

There are various techniques of keeping track of your plot threads, among which are:

*Outline or synopsis.* Writing with a synopsis is rarely popular, but it helps to see your story and recognize where your red herrings belong. The downside is your eyes can glaze over because you have so many details to keep track of.

*Spreadsheets.* This is a popular method, but it depends on how well your brain uses the likes of Microsoft Excel. I was amazed when I saw it being used, which pretty much explains how *my* brain works. Whether you're a fan of spreadsheets or not, using one to break down your story lets you literally slot in your red herrings.

*Timeline.* But you might be more visual. I know authors who use a timeline, which, if you're an editor like me, looks remarkably like diagramming a sentence (don't be alarmed), and they state the plot premise as the main line, then make plot threads and red herrings coming out from the main timeline. This is pretty simple, but you do have to get used to the technique. You can make the timeline a complex one or a simple one; this allows you to break down your story and finesse where you would like to slip in a misleading plot thread or two.

*Whiteboard.* This is old school. A whiteboard or a big board in general is pretty basic. Using this technique depends on whether you have the space to set one up. It allows you to write down plot elements and red herrings and literally check things off. The downside is that it allows the eye to get used to a reminder on the board and skip over it, so you may need to use different-colored markers.

*Scrivener.* This is a popular method, so if you want to break down your story into blocks, this may be for you. If you're curious, check out Gwen Hayes's *Romancing the Beat*; she uses Scrivener to block out her stories. If you're familiar with writing TV or movie scripts, Scrivener can also be used in a storyboard fashion. And speaking of which ...

*Storyboards.* If you're not familiar with these, it's a technique used for TV and movie scripts, and your story is plotted out in sequence like a comic book for visualizing a movie or animation. The process as it's known today, according to Wikipedia, was developed at Walt Disney Productions during the early 1930s. If you think visually, this might be good way to plot and slip in red herrings.

*Note-gathering programs.* A note-gathering app like Microsoft OneNote gathers notes, drawings, screen grabs, and even audio commentaries. In addition, a file created in OneNote can be shared with other OneNote users. This software is terrific for a lot of detail; I have a client who uses this, but I've found that it may be *too* powerful, because I have gotten lost in the many pages and sections looking for details I needed. OneNote allows you to have an entire section specifically for red herrings.

*Index cards.* This is for authors who go *real* old school. You can literally have an index card and label it "Red Herrings" and keep it handy as you're building your story, using different-colored cards for plot, theme, characters, and most important, red herrings. But don't lose that card!

There are any number of ways of tracking red herrings or plot threads. I used sticky notes and random scribbles to come up with the details for my work, and that, I can tell you, is inefficient. Check out if any of these do it for you; if not, there's going to be the one for you that does.

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*Elizabeth MS Flynn is a professional editor and has been for more than 40 years, working with topics as diverse as academia, technology, finance, genre fiction, and comic books. Her work for this article comes from her presentation on the topic for the Columbia River Sisters in Crime chapter.*

## Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



*This year of Smart Marketing  
is all about reinventing our businesses.  
For the third quarter, we'll cover:  
The trials of being more than one person;  
Avoiding the pitfalls that led me here;  
How I'm launching Author Z!*

When I determined to create a new, unrelated-to-me pen name under which I planned to republish some of my existing books, it felt ... exciting.

Who among us hasn't dreamed of being someone else? Of taking on a new and drastically different persona? It was almost like starting over at a new school where I could decide to be whoever I wanted. Cool kids table, here I come!

Being who I am, I thought of the fun stuff first: I bought several wigs so that I could venture onto certain social media platforms in disguise. I consulted with a makeup expert on how to tweak my look and affect a virtual makeover whenever I wanted to appear as Author X. I invested in some software that allowed me to record videos with filters and other features that dramatically altered the shape of my face and the sound of my voice.

I gave my new author ego a great deal of thought as I determined certain nuances of her personality, her age, where she lived, and even her birthday (I gave her my late mother's birthday so it was easy to remember!). She's single, because I so clearly am not; she's a generation younger than me, and she lives in a different state. She's got a hip, cool vibe that this fifty-something grandmother could only dream of pulling off!

At first, writing her newsletters and interacting with her readers wasn't that much of a challenge. It was almost like slipping into the minds of one of my characters. But in the past

year since I've been living this double life, I've found that certain things are not as easy as I would have hoped.

I've noticed that when I look over my plans for the next quarter, I'm far more likely to slip back into my old ways and work on promos, writing, and releases for Tawdra than I am to brainstorm new marketing for Author X. This is frustrating because I know that pouring work and energy into my old, original brand—aka **me!**—is a losing proposition. The ROI is consistently poor. My own releases disappear into the ether on the regular.

So, why do I bother?

I've thought about this quite a bit. The first and biggest reason is that it's easier to be Tawdra. I've been publishing as myself for over a decade. I have a reader group who knows me, newsletter subscribers who are familiar with my work, my background, and my personality. I can be myself.

Second, I can rationalize that I have made certain promises to my existing reader base. I've committed to publishing books in ongoing series—so even when I know that investing the time in writing and releasing those books is a losing game, I can easily justify doing it. The readers expect it! I made a promise!

Third ... I think that there's still a part of me that wants to succeed on my own terms, under my own name. When I released my very first book, I was deliberate about not writing under a pen name. My first name was given to me by my parents, and my last name was gifted to me by my husband. Seeing that name on my book covers means something to me. Not to mention the fact that I've written and released well over a hundred books under that name; I've worked very hard for a long time. It's not a little disappointing to think that I might find success under a name that has nothing at all to do with the real me.

The cold, hard truth, though, is that I can stamp my foot and throw a tiny inner hissy fit all I want, and it's not going to change the facts. There are some strong and valid reasons for why I made the decision I did—to invent new names and move my books there—and if I am not willing to invest a hundred percent of my energy and efforts to make that decision work, why bother at all?

This summer I've taken a deep breath and determined to focus fully on Author X. I've moved most of Tawdra's projects to the back burner. I've shifted my marketing budget to accommodate the needs of Author X. And I've begun to try to get into her headspace, to ponder how she sees and interacts with her readers. I've established some goals to move her career forward.

Among those goals is sending a regular newsletter as I continue to build her subscriber list. I'm looking for ways in which I can be authentic without feeling icky about it. And since I've discovered that social media platforms like Facebook are really tough for Author X—she has no organic friends or community, after all—I'm choosing instead to spend her time and energy in places where she can shine even without that sort of realistic interaction.

At the end of the day, I know that Author X and I have one important passion in common: we both love and believe in the books that we've written. We're excited to share them with a wide world of readers. And we definitely want to see those books succeed in a big way. After all, Author X might not be wonderful about pulling her own weight when it comes to working and writing, but she does love those pretty royalty payments!

Guess it's time to dig out those fun wigs again—and slide into my alter ego!

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*Tawdra Kandle* is the USA Today bestselling author of over 130 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.



## ACA Liaison Quarterly Notes

*By Rebecca Zanetti*



As the spring moves into summer, there are more questions than answers in the legal arena for our industry. I fairly recently became your liaison to the Authors Coalition of America, and it seemed like a good idea to start a quarterly column to keep everyone informed. As a former lawyer, I'm having a lot of fun diving into the different arenas here.

For those of you who don't know, the ACA is an association of 23 organizations that represents authors, photographers, illustrators, and other creators. The coalition was incorporated to receive and distribute foreign-specific royalty payments for American works (U.S. copyrighted works) that are photocopied abroad, a method that is subject to the laws of other countries. In other words, we receive money from the ACA, which collects it from other countries. So please remember to fill out that member survey every year when you pay your dues, and mark every box for which you qualify! [Here's a link](#) if you'd like to know more about the ACA.

Some members of the coalition draft proposed legislation and meet with our representatives in the U.S., and our organizations are often invited to sign on to legal letters and amicus briefs. As the liaison, I keep our NINC Board informed and pass on letters, briefs, and statements should NINC want to sign on, which is a board decision, ultimately.

Right now in the legal field, artificial intelligence (AI) is taking up all of the oxygen. There are three areas that we are watching:

### **Payment to authors**

There's no question that our books have been used to train AI. The cat is out of the bag on this one, so the question is, what happens now? I don't know about you, but if somebody uses my books and then makes money, I'd like to be paid.

All you have to do is jump onto ChatGPT and ask them about one of your characters. I did so and asked for 15 quotes in the voice of Talen Kayrs, a character in my Dark Protector series. After telling me that AI didn't have direct quotes, it proceeded to give me pretty good quotes, saying that: "I can certainly help create some humorous, lighthearted, or sarcastic remarks that a character like Talen Kayrs might say based on his character traits. He's known for being strong, dominant, protective, but also having a sense of humor." Hmmm. Sounds to me like my book was used to train this AI.

Since our works are being used in this matter, what can we do? We should get paid, if nothing else. So the Authors Guild has been proposing legislation to different legislators. Some of the language has potential collective bargaining agreements with opt-out possibilities, of course. Right now, as I'm sure you know, this is all in the infancy stages. I'll keep you updated.

### **Labeling AI works as AI**

If AI is being used and sold; whether it's as photographs, illustrations, or books; then they should be labeled as such. There will be proposed legislation for this as well. In addition, we have been told by AI creators that it is possible to determine if a book has been created by AI or a human. Apparently there are programs that can do this.

So at some point, if you have friends who are using AI to create their books, you might want to give them a heads-up that those labels will probably be in place someday. It might be better to start disclosing to readers and consumers now. While I'm skeptical that AI can create a book with the heart that we as humans can, that doesn't mean people aren't giving it a try.

### **AI language for publishing contracts**

The Authors Guild has sample contract clauses for protecting authors' rights regarding the use of their books by their publishers regarding AI. The proposed language specifically retains such rights for the author. The Guild has sample clauses for the use of AI, audiobooks, translations, and cover design. You can [go to the Guild's website](#) for updated language.

### **Other than that**

The other interesting item in the legal world would be the United States Supreme Court's May 18 ruling in *Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., v. Goldsmith, et al.* In this case, a while back, Andy Warhol changed a copyrighted photograph for a paid one-time use in *Vanity Fair*. Unbeknownst to the photographer, he created 15 other works. One of the works was recently featured on Condé Nast. The original photographer saw it, and this current lawsuit ensued between the foundation and the photographer. The question came down to fair use, which is fascinating, and the Supreme Court held 7-2 in favor of the photographer—strongly protecting her copyright.

[Fair use allows somebody to use a small amount of copyrighted work for certain purposes such as commentary, teaching, research, etc., without having to obtain the copyright owner's permission. (This is a simplified explanation, by far.)]

What's interesting in this case is the rather cutting back and forth between the majority opinion written by Justice Sotomayor and the dissent written by Justice Kagan. Those two justices are usually in lock step together, so seeing this disagreement is something new. Unfortunately, take a strong look at the dissent and how little two justices care about copyright law. (If you read the opinion, skip the syllabus because it's boring and remember to pay attention to the footnotes for the fun stuff there.) [Here's the link.](#)

Other than AI and the Supreme Court, we're keeping a watch on the WGA Writers Strike, different state laws that deal with rights for freelancers, and the use of AI in Europe. I hope to have more to report on those subjects in the future.

So that's what's going on right now. I plan to update this column quarterly, and hopefully there'll be some news on at least the AI front by then. However, as you all know, we are moving into an election cycle here in the U.S., so we'll see if anything gets done. Until then, have a wonderful summer.

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*New York Times, USA Today, Publishers Weekly and Wall Street Journal bestselling author [Rebecca Zanetti](#) has published more than 70 novels and novellas, which have been translated into several languages, with millions of copies sold worldwide. Her books have received Publishers Weekly and Kirkus starred reviews, favorable Washington Post and New York Times book reviews, and been included in Amazon Best Books of the Year. Rebecca has ridden in a locked Chevy trunk, has asked the unfortunate delivery guy to release her from a set of handcuffs, and has discovered the best silver mine shafts in which to bury a body ... all in the name of research. Honest.*

# The Mad Scribbler

## Triggered

By Laura Resnick



*“The goal is power and control over the target, to make them feel helpless to do anything.”*

—Jim C. Hines

This month’s issue of *Nink* includes a feature article by my friend Jim Hines (“Understanding and Fighting Back Against Harassment”). I respect Jim as a science fiction and fantasy writer, a humorist, and a compassionate and knowledgeable voice on various social issues—including some that can be difficult to discuss, such as discrimination and sexual violence. I also enjoy his company, though I haven’t had the opportunity to see him in person lately.

I read his article pre-publication. As usual, I appreciated his clarity of thought and expression on the subject of harassment. I was also surprised to discover that I was triggered by the article.

I froze for a day... and then I set aside the topic I had been working on for this month’s column, postponing it until next month, and decided to dive deeper into something Jim wrote:

In 2013, a big-name editor at a major SF/F publishing house lost his job after multiple reported incidents of sexual harassment. Among the reports and stories shared around this time was an author who reported that after she signed with this publisher, other writers had quietly warned her about this editor.

She'd signed with them in 2002.

In other words, this editor's harassment wasn't a one-time thing. It wasn't an isolated incident. It was an ongoing problem for more than a decade.

It was a problem for much longer than a decade. I signed with that same publishing company in the mid-1990s, and that guy was my editor for several years.

Multiple people immediately warned me about him—years earlier than the author Jim mentions, and long before the editor was publicly exposed and lost his job. Indeed, so *many* people warned me about his habit of sexual harassment, I thought it seemed to be his most widely known characteristic.

I'll cut to the chase and say he did not sexually harass me. Yet he damaged me in ways that I now realize, due to how unsettled I was by being reminded of him when I read Jim's article, that still affect me today—20 years after the last time I ever had contact with him.

While it's entirely possible the editor just had zero interest in sexually harassing me, I think Jim covers a likely explanation in his article: "It's funny how people who claim they're just 'socially awkward' never harass people with *more* power... It's a deliberate choice to victimize people who are less likely to speak up or fight back."

I didn't fit a comfortable victim profile for this particular predator. I was a confident and experienced writer with more than a dozen book sales by then. But probably more to the point, this editor was acquainted with my father (Mike Resnick, 1942-2020), who was a prominent science fiction writer. I think my being the daughter of a strong male figure who had high status in that world discouraged this editor from viewing me as sexual prey.

Also, I was careful. For example, because of his reputation, I made sure never to be alone with him. On the few occasions we met in person, I insisted on a public place, such as the crowded coffee shop or lobby of our conference hotel. These are things you have to think about when you're working with a sexual harasser.

But even without sexual harassment, our working relationship was an exhausting, unprofessional, abusive nightmare that ultimately made me physically ill from stress for a prolonged period—the only time in my life that's ever happened.

Because although not all liars and gaslighters are sexual harassers, all sexual harassers are liars and gaslighters.

Jim writes: "It's always a misunderstanding. An accident. A miscommunication. It was all in fun, and you're overreacting... The goal is to make the targets second-guess themselves..."

It was common for us to have conversations that the editor then denied we'd ever had. It was even more common for him to claim we'd *had* conversations we'd *never* had. He frequently lied to his superiors and my agent about what I said to him. Eventually, to protect myself, I insisted he could no longer speak to me by phone; all communication must always be in

writing. But he stuck to his lies even after—on numerous occasions—I produced emails proving he was lying. And my agent (who had placed multiple clients with him) and his superiors just shrugged off these frequent incidents where he wasted everyone’s time and focus with his lies, gaslighting, and tail-chasing gibberish.

When I received page proofs that were missing 5,000 words of text, or a cover proof that was full of typos or had copy for the wrong book, or discovered that my book had missed its release date (because it gathered dust on his desk for so long) and so the chain stores were canceling orders... my emails and phone calls to him would go unanswered for weeks or months—and then he would tell my agent that he *had* answered me (and my agent would chuckle and shrug it off, or—increasingly—side with him).

He was also malicious and verbally abusive. After I had a very positive meeting with his boss, for example, which concluded with the boss giving me his personal phone number and urging me to get in touch next time I was in town, the editor sent me a toxic email castigating me for “inappropriate” behavior and claiming his boss disliked me and found me “distasteful.” On another occasion, right after I signed a contract with his company that doubled my previous advance level there, he told me I was a “disappointing” writer and his boss didn’t think I was worth what they had just agreed to pay me.

Also for my own protection, I kept a detailed written record of everything that happened. I re-read it today, and it’s still surreal.

For example, at one of our rare in-person meetings, he told me he had just returned from the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany, where he had bumped into my German editor. And he told my German editor that *after* I delivered the manuscript to Germany, and *after* the Germans had paid to get it translated... I had substantially revised the book for him, my American editor. And so the Germans were publishing the wrong version of the book.

This was completely false. The manuscript I had sent to Germany was identical to the manuscript being published in the U.S.

I then said so. And the editor told me I was wrong. He insisted I had revised the book at his request (no) and just didn’t remember doing it (uh, *no*). And now my German publisher, he said, was absolutely *furios* at me about this—so angry, it sounded as if my lucrative German deal was in jeopardy.

After a few minutes, I realized how absurd it was for me to sit in that coffee shop arguing that I had certainly not done a major revision I just *didn’t remember* doing. So I ended the meeting.

As soon as I could, I contacted my agent and asked him to contact the German editor and straighten out this idiotic mess. He did so. And when he called me back a few days later, he reported that... the German had no idea what he was talking about. There was never any such conversation between the two editors. In fact, the German never encountered my American editor at the book fair at all. The whole thing... *never happened*.

My agent laughed off the bizarre incident as just one of those weird hallucinogenic things this editor sometimes said. (Excuse me?) And when I confronted the editor... he claimed *our* conversation had never happened and pretended he had no idea what I was talking about.

*The goal is to make the targets second-guess themselves...*

On another occasion, in-house production balked at the length of a book I delivered. (The editor had told me in multiple emails that the length was no problem. When it turned out it *was* a problem, he told his company and my agent that he had advised me the length was a problem and I had refused to listen. It was yet another instance where I produced emails proving he was lying, and everyone ignored those and treated *me* as the problem.) So I decided to split the manuscript into two books. The second book wasn't covered by my contract, so my agent said, just send us a contract for it, same terms as before.

The editor refused. He declared, through "logic" so warped I won't attempt to reproduce it, that he had the "right" to publish the second book *without* issuing a contract, licensing the rights, or paying an advance for it.

Even my agent disagreed with him that time. But the editor rejected rational arguments and doubled down. He had the manuscript, and he fully intended to (let's be clear) pirate my work.

*The goal is power and control over the target, to make them feel helpless to do anything...*

I told my agent I would have to sue the publisher if no one stopped this jerk.

My agent sent a letter via messenger service to the publishing company's CEO, the executive editor, and the legal department, objecting to this. Within an hour of the letter being received, the company offered me a contract for that book.

The editor never acknowledged what he had tried to do, let alone the fact that he was overruled as soon as his company found out about it.

My agent just shrugged off the whole incident.

The publishing company swept it under the rug. No one ever mentioned it, never mind apologized to me. And rather than fire him for that stunt, they kept him in his senior position there for another decade... even as the sexual harassment behavior became more problematic for the company.

Not long after that, I refused to keep working with the editor, and I fired the agent. I was so stressed and demoralized by several years of dealing with hundreds of incidents like the ones I've described, I was burned out. I walked away and turned my back on my fiction career for a couple of years. Even after I came back, I was never the same again. I never returned to being the prolific writer I was before that editor spent several years gaslighting and abusing me.

When he was publicly exposed, fired, and permanently ostracized, thereby losing his power—real, potential, or imagined—over writers' earnings and careers, there were weeks of online revelations by women he'd sexually harassed. More than I had imagined.

Jim wrote in his article: "If this is such a widespread problem, why hasn't more been done to stop it? How could that editor get away with it for so many years?"

Although the editor didn't sexually harass me, my experience is certainly an answer.

My agent knew what this guy did, and he shrugged or chuckled, and kept placing more writers with him. His superiors knew and ignored it, or covered for him, or even promoted him. They all *knew*, and they decided to shield and support him, this sole inept and troublesome creep, rather than shield and support the many writers he gaslighted, abused, and harassed.

People like him get away with damaging people like me because people like them are complicit.

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*Laura Resnick is a founding member of NINC, a past president, and the current central coordinator.*



## NINC Member Discounts

By Abigail Drake



This month we're highlighting **three fabulous discounts** for our members.

The first is provided by [Nate Hoffelder](#), who has been helping people fix broken tech since 2010. He designs and repairs WordPress sites, and acts as a virtual IT department for authors. He strives to be certain that the websites he builds look great, run smoothly, and turn readers into superfans. If you hire Nate to build your website, he will include one year of free software updates, daily backups, and security checks.

The second comes from [Publishers Weekly](#). They are offering a year of PW (in your preferred format) at a discounted rate for NINC members. This is a great way to stay connected to important industry news and learn the buzz around the very best upcoming books.

And the third comes from [Publishers Weekly Select](#). This is a marketing program designed for authors to reach PW's audience of booksellers, librarians, publishers, agents, film scouts, and industry insiders. The deal includes a listing (cover art, synopsis, on-sale info), a feature placement (in both PW and *BookLife*), an announcement on Facebook and Twitter channels, and a six-month subscription to *Publishers Weekly's* digital edition.

For **more information** on all these discounts and more, please check out the [Member Freebies and Discounts section](#) of our website.

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*Abigail Drake, who writes contemporary romance and women's fiction, is the award-winning author of 19 novels. She majored in Japanese and economics in college and spent years living abroad, collecting stories wherever she visited. She and her husband, whom she met in Istanbul, have three adult sons.*

# Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

## Networking (these groups are for NINC members only):

- Email list for all NINC members: <https://groups.io/g/ninlink>
- NINC Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>
- Follow NINC on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/Novelists\\_Inc](https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc)
- NINC on [Clubhouse](#): Novelists, Inc. Virtual Tiki Bar
- Critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>
- Traditionally published authors: <https://groups.io/g/NINCTradPubbedAuthors>
- SF/F & speculative fiction writers: <https://groups.io/g/NINCswordsandrayguns>
- Authors of thriller/crime/suspense: <https://groups.io/g/NINC suspense-thriller-crime>
- Discuss creating book covers: <https://groups.io/g/NINCcovercreators/>

## Conference:

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

## Newsletter

- Propose an article: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/propose-an-article/>
- Submit a letter to the editor: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/submit-letter-to-editor/>
- Newsletter archives: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/news-archive/>

## Website (You must be logged in to access these services.)

- Legal Fund: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/legal-fund/>
- Sample Letters: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/sample-letters/>
- Articles & Links: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/articles-and-links/>

## Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> along with other member discounts.

## **Volunteer**

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



*Founded in 1989*

### **NINC Statement of Principle**

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

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

### **Founders**

- Rebecca Brandewyne
- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

### **2023 Board of Directors**

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

- President: Celeste Barclay
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- Advisory Council Representative: Steven Womack

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## 2023 Committees

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

- Central Coordinator: Laura Resnick
- 2023 Conference Committee
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  - Assistant Conf. Director & Programming Chair: Tawdra Kandle
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  - NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley
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- Membership Committee
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  - Sarah Woodbury
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  - Michele Dunaway
  - Katherine Garbera
  - Cindy Kirk
  - Nancy Robards Thompson
- Discounts Program: Abigail Drake

### **Central Coordinator**

Novelists, Inc. c/o Laura Resnick  
 P.O. Box 331, Covington KY 41012  
[admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com)

*Address changes may be made on the website.*

### ***Nink* Newsletter**

*July 2023 edition – Vol. 34, No. 7*

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

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

Publication: 12 issues annually. Available in PDF and epub formats. Public issues redact NINC members-only information.

To change subscription preferences, please contact [admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com).

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