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Contents

President's Voice

By Celeste Barclay

My mind and body are still recuperating from this year's conference. Long days have me still yawning, and my mind is buzzing with topics discussed and strategies waiting to be implemented. I don't know about you, but I needed a nap on Monday. But I'm back at the grindstone, chugging away at a work in progress. I was about halfway done when I arrived at NINC, and after three days of work, I'm in the last 25k homestretch. Are you caught up?

When I haven't been writing, I've been reviewing my copious notes, trying to remember what some of my shorthand means. I've been annotating them as one does when they've spent far too much time in school and as an educator. The topic that keeps drawing me back is AI. Thus far, I've skirted the topic and given it a wide berth in my President's Voice. It's not because I have a fundamental opposition or support for the topic. It's because it's divisive, and that's not the point of this space. I'm weighing in now, but not as a proponent or opponent. I'm a curious party.

I fully and openly admit my ongoing skepticism, but I have just as much curiosity. Doubting science isn't the root of my skepticism. It's in doubting human nature, or rather, recognizing human nature from a rather misanthropic lens. I find the science fascinating. The complexity and technical advancement we've seen in the past year is astounding. This is a field that expands exponentially by the month and year. A system's ability to crawl amounts of information that defy most people's understanding and conception amazes me. To assess, analyze, and synthesize is at a level that most people assumed impossible for a computer program. It's also at a level that many people have feared for decades now. My overarching concern is the potential and current exploitation of the program and its data sources.

I will completely disclose that I don't love the means by which they gather the information for the programs. I don't love knowing my IP and that of many of my peers are solely available thanks to pirates. My visceral reaction is: someone has already robbed me once, now I'm being robbed again. But I can set aside my emotional response and look at it more objectively than

subjectively. Just as I've accepted that pirates will continue to steal, I've accepted that certain AI programs will continue to crawl and scrape. It's taken me a while to reach that level of acceptance without a bitter taste in my mouth. But my understanding has also grown with time.

It reminds me of that—in my opinion, obnoxious—book, *Who Moved My Cheese?* Grad school and a job required me to read that thing three times (well, I read it once, but had to discuss it thrice). Not everyone loves change, or at least doesn't love all change. But we adapt. We change our minds and opinions, or we simply grin and bear it. I had a friend in college who said I was proof of Pavlov's theory. If I listened to a type of music often enough and long enough, I could usually come to like it. Discussions, articles, and software have exposed me to AI often enough and long enough that I've come around to at least accepting it. I think we're all in that position.

I've been using one form of AI or another for ages. As a professional novelist, I swear up, down, and sideways by ProWritingAid. It is a fundamental part of my writing process. It's trained me back into using the Chicago style for commas after nearly two decades of using APA and teaching MLA. I taught students how *not* to use passive voice, yet I was a culprit of using it when I first started writing novels. PWA trained me out of that too, or at least I recognize it before the line even shows up beneath the sentence. I will go to my grave defending my split infinitives and -ly adverbs.

I experimented with ChatGPT a few months ago and created a blurb for a recent Historical Romance. It took some finessing and cutting down because I hadn't known how to properly prompt it at the time. But it certainly gave me a jumping-off point. The childlike part of me loves watching the text seemingly magically appear (told you I love my -ly adverbs). Now that I've attended a couple of the NINC AI sessions and have an even clearer understanding of how to prompt the programs, I foresee myself using it for upcoming blurbs, and I've started toying with creating ad copy too.

For me, my line in the sand for *myself* is creating anything to do with a manuscript. But there's a simple explanation for why it isn't for me. It has nothing to do with ethics or morals. Writing is cathartic. I can slip away into my imagination, and frankly, there are plenty of days where it's far nicer than reality. If outlining a manuscript with assistance works for some folks, then I'm glad they found a tool that helps them. If using it for a skeleton they can further flesh out on their own, then I'm glad they found a tool that helps them. If it's an equity tool for some authors, that makes sense. Not all things are created equal, but there's a definite and clear place for equity.

I'm still on the fence about how I feel when authors write entire manuscripts through AI. From a philosophical perspective, a fiction author, if using AI bypasses the entire creative process, then it seems like the joy of writing is completely eclipsed. This is my opinion. It's my curiosity into the human psyche. It's my lack of full understanding of other authors' GMC. I can see that and admit it. It's not a judgment.

My gripe, if you will, is when profit is the pure motivation. When it's not about quality but quantity. When the intent is to blockade the market or hold it hostage by flooding retailers in a way that we mere mortals cannot keep up. When something unethically sourced the information used to develop the systems (in this case, ethics are in the eye of the beholder).

Telling someone to read the Terms of Service is a flippant response, and one I've heard several times. The retailers purposely riddle them with legalese many laypeople can't understand. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, but I can also appreciate people's attempt to understand them but not having the prerequisite knowledge needed. The feeling of a lack of consent still niggles, just as I think it does for others. My personal goal is to be more open-minded to both sides of the argument and everything in between. This isn't my field of expertise, so I have much to learn. I'm willing to. My concern may be a nonstarter in a few months, or it may remain. TBD.

That sentiment leads me to pose these questions:

1. If you're opposed to the use of AI to generate fiction content (as opposed to assisting, i.e., Word's spell check and editor, Grammarly, PWA, etc.), can you articulate your concerns? Or is it still a knee-jerk response?
2. If you're supportive of the use of AI to generate fiction content, can you articulate why you intend to or currently use it?
3. Can either side make cogent arguments as opposed to emotional or vague ones for why we should treat AI-generated content the same as human-generated content?
4. If this is here to stay, can you reconcile yourself to it and even use it by your ethical standards?
5. What will be your ongoing GMC?

Those of us who are still uncertain must find some level of acceptance because swimming upstream is exhausting. It's also preventing us from discovering and utilizing tools that may very well improve our writing skills. Those of us who are certain of its place and use may need to have patience with those who haven't reached your position of acceptance and comfort.

They've moved our cheese, and it doesn't matter who did it. Are you prepared to change strategy and find your new path? I ask this as I prepare to run this article through PWA.

—Celeste Barclay

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/

Publishing News

Hot Shots
Recently in the headlines

WGA strike has an end in sight

After five months on strike, the Writers Guild of America has reached a tentative deal with studios, with good news for writers: They secured most of the terms they were looking for, including increased royalty payments for streaming content and a guarantee that AI-generated material cannot be considered source material. (If it could, that would mean adaptation pay rates for writers, which are lower.) This means that AI-generated material in the book world can't be optioned because it can't be considered source material. Read a summary of the contract.

SAG-AFTRA, the union representing actors, is striking separately and has not yet reached a deal.

Amazon KDP limits how many books can be uploaded per day

In yet another indication that Amazon is attempting to limit abuse by AI-driven accounts, it has now instituted a three-book-a-day limit for new titles. The number might be lowered again in the future. Any author or publisher affected by the change will be notified and allowed to ask for an exception.

Book sales update

According to NPD BookScan, U.S. print book sales are down about 4% versus last year. The biggest decline is in the category of juvenile nonfiction (down 10%); the most stable area is adult fiction, which is running more or less flat against 2022 sales.

A summary of the AI lawsuits now underway—specific to writers
The Authors Guild class-action suit is the latest action against OpenAI and also the most narrow in its claims.

Last week, the Authors Guild filed a class-action lawsuit against OpenAI for copyright infringement. But their lawsuit is not the first to be filed on behalf of authors, and it may not be the last. Which raises a couple of questions: What differentiates these lawsuits? And do they stand a chance?

Here's a summary of the class-action lawsuits currently in progress:

Tremblay v. OpenAI
Filed on June 28 in Northern District of California
Representative plaintiffs: Paul Tremblay and Mona Awad
(Awad later dismissed her claims without giving a reason.)
Complaints include: Direct copyright infringement, vicarious copyright infringement, DMCA violations, unfair competition, negligence, unjust enrichment

Silverman v. Meta
Filed on July 7 in Northern District of California
Representative plaintiffs: Sarah Silverman, Richard Kadrey, and Christopher Golden
Complaints include: Direct copyright infringement, vicarious copyright infringement, unfair competition, negligence, unjust enrichment

Silverman v. OpenAI
Filed on July 7 in Northern District of California
Representative plaintiffs: Sarah Silverman, Richard Kadrey, and Christopher Golden
Complaints include: Direct copyright infringement, vicarious copyright infringement, DMCA violations, unfair competition, negligence, unjust enrichment

Chabon v. OpenAI
Filed on Sept. 8 in Northern District of California
Representative plaintiffs: Michael Chabon, David Henry Hwang, Matthew Klam, Rachel Louise Snyder, and Ayelet Waldman
Complaints include: Direct copyright infringement, vicarious copyright infringement, DMCA violations, unfair competition, negligence, unjust enrichment

[Authors Guild v. OpenAI](#)

Filed on Sept. 19 in Southern District of New York

Representative plaintiffs: David Baldacci, Mary Bly, Michael Connelly, Sylvia Day, Jonathan Franzen, John Grisham, Elin Hilderbrand, Christina Baker Kline, Maya Shanbhag Lang, Victor Lavalle, George R.R. Martin, Jodi Picoult, Douglas Preston, Roxana Robinson, George Saunders, Scott Turow, and Rachel Vail

Complaints include: Direct copyright infringement, vicarious copyright infringement, contributory copyright infringement

The Authors Guild is working with two law firms to bring their case, and it focuses its claims on copyright infringement of fiction writers only. In a call this week, Authors Guild CEO Mary Rasenberger said fiction offers a "cleaner case" because the defense can't argue that the model is merely ingesting and outputting facts, which are not protected under copyright. With fiction, the models are ingesting entirely made-up worlds, not facts. The Guild expects that a positive outcome of this narrower case will benefit all authors, of course, not just fiction writers.

The Guild's complaint notes that, until recently, ChatGPT could be prompted to return quotations of text from copyrighted books with some accuracy. That's changed: ChatGPT generally responds to such prompts saying it cannot provide verbatim excerpts from copyrights texts. The complaint reads, "While ChatGPT previously provided such excerpts and in principle retains the capacity to do so, it has been restrained from doing so, if only temporarily, by its programmers. In light of its timing, this apparent revision of ChatGPT's output rules is likely a response to the type of activism on behalf of authors …"

Rasenberger told us the Authors Guild case differs from the others in that the only claims are for copyright infringement in the course of training. "We are not suing over outputs," she says, because the Guild has been advised that would be a challenging case to prove on a class-action basis. The other cases *are* suing based on outputs, but the facts of an outputs-infringement case are likely to be very different from author to author, and a successful class-action suit requires numerous and typical plaintiffs. Of course, nothing stops individual authors from suing against a large language model that produces infringing outputs of their own work. (This might actually increase the likelihood of monetary relief—everyone knows that class-action plaintiffs rarely get big paydays; the bulk of the money ends up with the lawyers.) The Guild is also limiting their case to authors who have sold more than 5,000 copies, as an approximation for professional authors whose books were more likely ingested by AI.

That said, the Authors Guild complaint does discuss derivative works and outputs because, to prove these models aren't engaging in fair use, it's necessary to show potential harm. That may not be too difficult, given how highly commercial these authors and their imagined worlds are. The complaint reads, "Businesses are sprouting up to sell prompts that allow users to enter the world of an author's books and create derivative stories within that world. For example, a business called [Socialdraft](#) offers long prompts that lead ChatGPT to engage in 'conversations' with popular fiction authors like Plaintiff Grisham, Plaintiff Martin, Margaret Atwood, Dan Brown, and others about their works, as well as prompts that promise to help customers 'Craft

Bestselling Books with AI.'" The complaint describes a recent attempt to generate, via generative AI, the remaining volumes of George R.R. Martin's Game of Thrones series—a clear example of potential for harm.
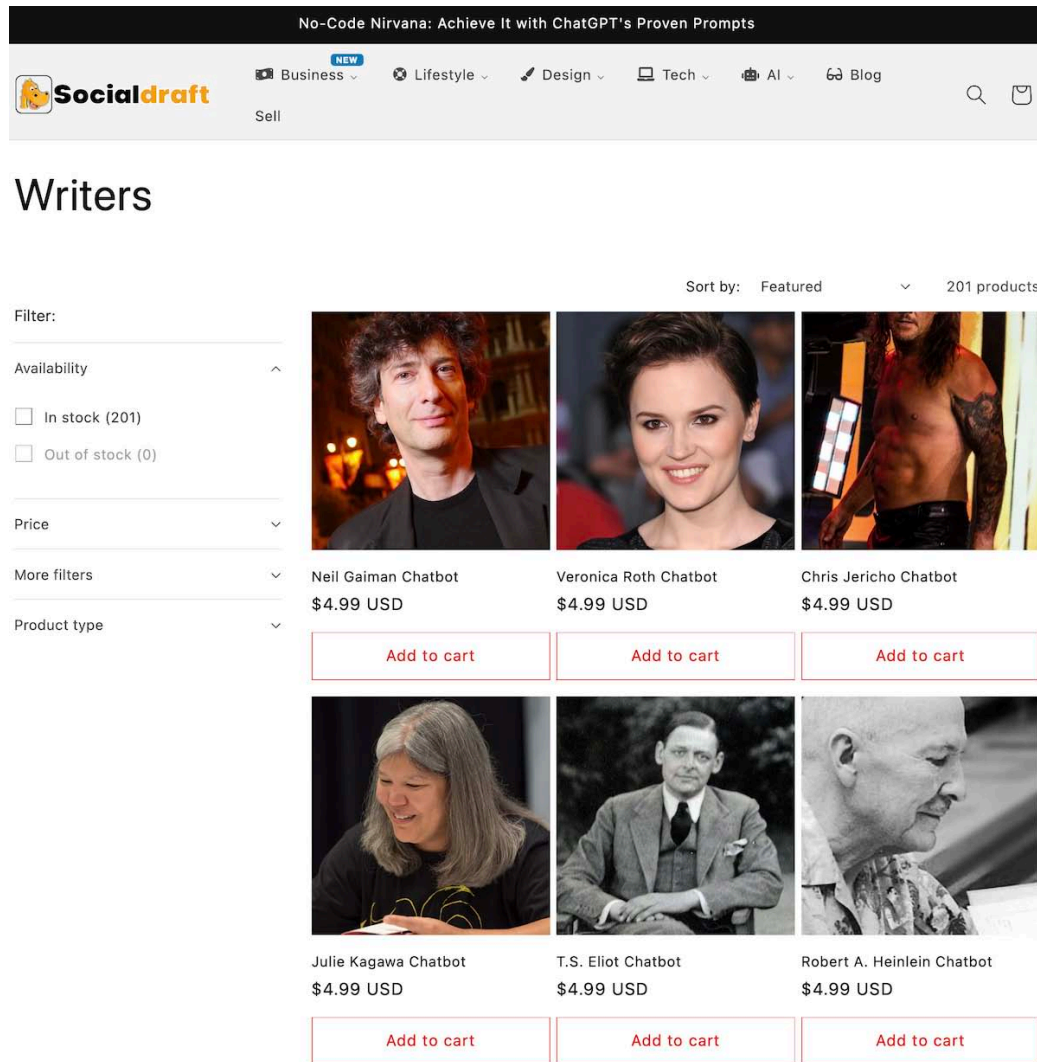
A screenshot of Socialdraft's writer chatbot offerings

Why these class-action lawsuits are not a slam dunk: It's already been well established that generative AI has been trained on copyrighted materials. That's not in dispute, and OpenAI plans to argue it's allowed under fair use because of the transformative nature of generative AI. As Benedict Evans observed recently, "[A] thousand stories themselves are just a fraction of a fraction of a percent of all the training data. The purpose is not for the [model] to know the content of any given story or any given novel—the purpose is for it to see the patterns in the output of collective human intelligence." In other words, the model doesn't care about or need your particular writing; your work is but a grain of sand on a vast beach, and outputs are generated out of that collective resource in a way that's not infringing. Obviously, there are worlds of disagreement about that.

Beyond arguments about fair use, here are just a few of the tricky questions raised:

- How much of a problem is it legally if these copyrighted materials were obtained by OpenAI or others from illegal or shadowy sources, rather than on the open web or in some legitimate manner?
- A living author can mimic the style of another writer without being accused of infringement (you cannot copyright a style of writing), but what if a person does it using AI? OpenAI has already put up some guardrails with art and illustration, disallowing generation of images with Dall-E that mimic the style of a living person.
- If it's not legal for ChatGPT to give you a summary of today's news headlines without permission or licensing from news outlets (and it seems like it might not be legal, but there's no clear verdict yet), is it okay to use ChatGPT to give you a summary of a copyrighted book without compensating the author/publisher? What about using ChatGPT to summarize a copyrighted book, then publishing that summary for profit? (The latter is already happening on Amazon. Here's an example of a summary of a recent release.) This has generally been considered acceptable under current copyright law, but current copyright law wasn't written to address the potential harms of generative AI.

Bottom line: There is limited precedent to rely on when considering whether use of copyrighted materials for training large language models can be considered fair use. Different courts may issue conflicting opinions, and some legal experts believe this issue will end up in the hands of the Supreme Court. The case to keep an eye on, no question, is the Authors Guild case, given its narrower focus on fiction and ingestion of copyrighted materials. In a conversation with IP expert Bill Rosenblatt, he speculated that a successful Authors Guild lawsuit could lead to a settlement on behalf of its members who have opted into the case, while authors not aligned with Authors Guild (or who decide not to opt in) might bring their own cases. Such legal action might continue until the government passes legislation that determines how to handle the IP issues of generative AI.

Trailblazes
Opportunities, launches, and startups

The United States now has a book ban czar
The U.S. Department of Education announced that Matt Nosanchuk has joined as Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office for Civil Rights—informally known as the book ban czar. In a press release, the department said, "Across the country, communities are seeing a rise in efforts to ban books—efforts that are often designed to empty libraries and classrooms of literature about LGBTQ people, people of color, people of faith, key historical events, and more. These efforts are a threat to students' rights and freedoms." Learn more.

Links of interest

Traditional publishing
- **An interview with KKR leader on the Simon & Schuster acquisition.** KKR hopes that within the next two years, all employees will have an opportunity to make considerable money through stock options. That also means educating employees on the business and how it profits, which should be interesting. Read Megan Greenwell at *Slate.* For a critical reading of this interview, see Kathleen Schmidt at Publishing Confidential.

AI
- **Is your book part of the corpus that trained generative AI models like ChatGPT?** *The Atlantic* has made a searchable database available and your book is likely mentioned. Read Alex Reisner (sub may be required; if so, try searching the same corpus here).
- **Spotify will use AI to replicate podcasters' voices and translate them into other languages.** The feature relies on OpenAI technology. Read Ashley Capoot at CNBC.

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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.

Book Bans
Author Voices

By Barbara Meyers

It only takes a cursory perusal of today's news coverage to happen upon a fight about book banning. It seems to be increasing in frequency, which is concerning to those of us who write books and believe in the freedom of expression. Like most aspects of human progression over time, book banning goes in cycles. And we repeatedly have to push back against it.

The beginning of book banning

Chinese emperor Qin Shih Huang Di wanted to control the written history of his time, but in doing so he actually went down in history as perhaps the earliest implementer of book banning. His measures were drastic when you learn he buried 460 Confucian scholars alive to assert total control over how he and his reign would be remembered. In 212 B.C., he burned all the books in his kingdom, retaining only a single copy of each for the Royal Library. Even those were destroyed before his death. With all previous historical records destroyed, he thought history could be said to begin with him.

The first book ban in the United States dates back to 1637, in what is known today as Quincy, Mass. Thomas Morton published his *New English Canaan*, which the Puritan government later banned for being "a harsh and heretical critique of Puritan customs and power structures."

For a further historical perspective on book banning, read NINC President Celeste Barclay's column in the April issue of *Nink*.

What is a book ban?

When a book is successfully "banned," that means a book has been removed from school curricula and/or public libraries because a person or group has objected to its content.

An attempt to get a book removed is called a challenge. Most public schools and libraries have boards made up of elected officials (or people appointed by elected officials) who have the power to remove books from the schools and libraries they oversee.

When book banning goes beyond libraries and schools

"My first reaction was to be ashamed," Pepper North says upon learning her first book, Zoey: *Dr. Richards' Littles® 1* was banned Jan. 25, 2022, on Amazon (English version only). She was told it violated their content guidelines. Social media and her newsletter fans were supportive, and North knows they made an impact on Amazon.

"The worst is the inability to get anyone to listen to you and the fear that Amazon could yank one book or all your books on one person's opinion, and there is nothing you can do. If that person is of another culture and beliefs, it makes it even tougher. How do you know what the playing field actually is?"

Sandra Hill learned about the influence of one person's opinion when she scheduled a book signing with the late Trish Jensen at a Wegman's supermarket. The store manager skimmed through one of Jensen's books, saw something he found objectionable, and decided they were "too sexy." He rescinded the offer for her to participate, did not advertise the event, and put Hill in the back of the store.

"Oddly," she says, "I write sexy books. Trish never did. It was embarrassing for her, me, the book distributor who came that day, and the publisher. In retrospect, I wish I had declined to participate too."

"One of my erotic romances was rejected on Draft2Digital by one of the library distributors because it was listed as being primarily for erotic content, etc.," Denise Agnew says. "What is funny about that is the next two books in the trilogy were not rejected and yet there is no toning down of the content in either book. So, who knows what sort of rules/criteria they use in that library system?"

Nora Roberts found it "shocking" when eight of her books were removed from school library shelves in Martin County, Florida, following a complaint.

"I'm surprised that they wouldn't want teenagers to read about healthy relationships that are monogamous, consensual, healthy, and end up in marriage," Roberts said about her books in an article in *The Hill*.

Not only does Roberts speak out about book banning, she also donates to individual libraries and to the EveryLibrary Institute, a national nonprofit focused on public policy and libraries.

Are book bans on the rise in the U.S.?

Yes. The American Library Association (ALA) keeps track of challenges and bans across the country. In 2021, the ALA recorded 729 book challenges targeting 1,597 titles. That's more than double 2020's figures and the highest number since the organization began recording data in 2000.

Challenged books focus

A recent analysis by PEN America found that many challenged books focus on communities of color, the history of racism in America, and LGBTQ characters. In fact, one in three books restricted by school districts in the past year featured LGBTQ themes or characters.

There have been a series of attacks on Sherman Alexie's multiple award-winning young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. In 2014 he told *The Guardian* that book banners want to control debate and limit imagination while his goal is to encourage debate and celebrate imagination.

According to The National Coalition Against Censorship, Alexie's book was one of its most frequently defended titles at that time.

When Brad Meltzer learned via social media of bans on his children's books about heroes like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., he was stunned. The books, aimed at ages five to eight, were meant to "help kids build character, kindness, and compassion one real hero at a time," according to Meltzer's website.

Meltzer told Freedom Forum his advice for those experiencing book bans was to not stand for it and to protest because bans are only going to increase and are born out of fear, and work because people are scared. One of the ways he and his supporters fought back was by helping to gather hundreds of the "not-to-be-permitted" books to be placed in Little Free Library locations.

Mississippi recently hosted its first Banned Books Festival in response to school districts removing scores of library books that have yet to be "approved."

On the festival's website, Reena Evers-Everette, director of the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Institute in Jackson, is quoted as saying, "These books are being banned, because some people want to erase history and erase the truth. That is why we need to take a stand for truth in holding this festival."

Kyle Lukoff, author of *Call Me Max*, a banned children's book about a transgender boy, has spoken extensively on the topic and refers to his pinned Tweet thread where he states, "I'm not the first to note how 'banned books' has tidily replaced 'diversity' as a way to silo marginalized authors away from discussing our craft, making us serve, again, only as emissaries of our people." Further in the thread he says, "…I'm sick of always talking about what my enemies are doing and wish I could just talk about what I'm doing, who my characters are, what stories I'm bringing into the world."

Maia Kobabe's autobiographical book, *Gender Queer*, tells the story of Kobabe's young adulthood and eventual coming out as nonbinary after many years of gender confusion. In a *USA Today* article, e says e believes that if e'd had a book like *Gender Queer*, it could have taken 10 years off eir questioning and confusion and uncertainty about who e was and how e was going to fit into the world.

Kobabe sees legislation like Florida's Parental Rights in Education bill, as part of the organized effort to erase trans, queer, and nonbinary voices from the public sphere.

According to a 2022 report by PEN America, Ellen Hopkins was the most frequently banned writer in the U.S. Hopkins began writing her first book, *Crank*, after watching her daughter struggle with drug use, teenage parenting, prostitution, and homelessness. She has

written several novels using topics such as homelessness and human trafficking based on her family's experiences in an effort to help kids make better choices.

What to do about book bans
1. Gather the facts. Book banning is often painted with a broad brush. For example, a "Florida Bans Books" headline may inaccurately reflect the decisions of one library or school district in one county.
2. Consider donating to organizations such as those mentioned above which fight against book bans.
3. Use your voice as an author and gather support from your readers and/or author organizations to oppose a book ban.
4. Use social media and your website to promote your position on book banning.

Books bridge divides between people

Perhaps author Jodi Picoult said it best when she told Anderson Cooper during a CNN interview, "As parents it's totally fine to make a decision about what your child can or cannot read. It is not fine for you to make a decision for everyone else's child." She went on to say, "Books bridge divides between people, and we know that book bans create them… Speak out as loudly as the people who are making the noise. Because there are far more people who don't want books banned in this country than the ones who do."

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Barbara Meyers writes an eclectic mix of contemporary romance and women's fiction stories which often feature a displaced child.

Library Insights Summit
ALA 2023

By Jennifer Stevenson

The American Library Association held its annual conference in Chicago in June. I attended the Library Insights Summit, an all-day program offered to publishers and authors.

There are four current major areas of concern to librarians: 1) diversity issues, among them being accessibility issues, serving diverse patron needs, and diversity of collections, which melds with 2) censorship and book banning, 3) cataloging and metadata, and 4) managing ebook collections.

Censorship and building diverse collections

An entire session of this daylong program was devoted to censorship and book banning concerns; indeed, the theme of the whole conference was devoted to some patrons' demand for more diverse books and other patrons' outrage at diverse books of any kind.

Speakers were from urban, suburban, and rural libraries. Significant quotes from the discussion:

- "The world is a war of ideas, and librarians are the arms dealers, selling weapons to all sides. There are so many kinds of content. I try to be content neutral, which is a challenge even more now."
- "The majority of libraries in the U.S. are rural. Rural librarians are special ops warriors in the war on ignorance."
- "Rural libraries are the most vulnerable to funding choke. They can't offer services and programs; they're lucky to have books. Get involved in your community outside of work. If they know your face outside of work, it's harder for them to get up into your face at work."
- "Collection development is the key. Ripples are more effective in rural communities than waves."

- "Don't back off the positive changes you've made in publishing underrepresented voices. They're a giant underserved market. Please do more. Expand your breadth of diversity. If something's not at the top of BISAC, we don't hear about it."

Distributors talk about cataloging and metadata

Metadata was not addressed on a very granular level during this program. This presentation was the part that the distributors thought their audience was capable of grokking.

Panelists from Ingram, IPG, and Baker & Taylor focused on the wholesalers' electronic forms that publishers fill out when they submit information about their books. *Indie authors also fill out these forms when uploading to these distributors.*

Librarians access books through 100% automated systems at distributors. This isn't Amazon, where authors must game the algorithm by fudging categories and keywords, and where ads for wildly inappropriate books turn up on book pages or in search results. Librarians appreciate precision. Thus, wholesalers cannot accommodate the fudge factor. Authors, do your very best to be specific and accurate in your use of BISAC categories and other metadata options.

Be accurate, thorough, consistent, and send in your launch or change data as early as possible.

Q&A

Q: What timing do you recommend for featured new releases?

Baker & Taylor: Three to six months out. Prefer six months.

IPG: Same. Prefer six because wholesalers are at three months.

Ingram: At least six months out, sometimes up to nine months. Some libraries buy a whole year's worth of books at a time. They might be making a list for five to six months down the road. Be early; you're more likely to get on a list.

Q: In what areas does accuracy count most?

Ingram: Most often, we see issues with hyphenated author names. We don't care how you do it, as long as it's consistent. Same for titles, series names, etc. If for marketing reasons you change a title, we understand that, but tell us clearly, either in the early stages before publication or in revision. The biggest problem we see with BISACs is that adult BISACs are appealing and so specific, but you can't use an adult BISAC for a children's book. You must start with Juvenile and drill down into their categories.

B&T: Have the data in the right place so libraries can spend their acquisition money correctly.

Q: For discoverability and marketing, how do libraries find your title, who is the target audience, how do you partner with wholesalers, what are your marketing plans, what outlets are ideal? What do you recommend? (These matters apply to indie authors as well as traditional publishers.)

B&T: Tell the wholesaler where you are promoting; we can tie that in. We do special webinars with authors.

IPG: Think of this as the ability of your market to find your books. You're not talking directly to your customers. You tell us about it, and we promote it for you.

Ingram: If you're looking to advertise and don't have money, pick a subject that's hot with libraries; combine that into an ad with your book. Or market through your wholesaler. They're the ones who are reaching libraries.

Q: What do your companies do to promote books?

B&T: We have over 30 digital catalogs. We like trendy stuff, new authors, publishers rebranding themselves to librarians and the market. We send ARCs to our top librarian customers, do webinars. We're happy to work with you.

IPG: Our primary reach into libraries is our email list, which follows specific topics. We have a monthly newsletter and we're on social media.

Ingram: Ingram's flagship publication is *Ingram Advance,* on various topics. Get a cover to us in advance. Our monthly newsletter contains articles, topical ads, and information about how standing orders have changed. We also do social media.

Q: What's your process for identifying diverse titles, and how do you code them?

Ingram: We use the BISAC system, but it hasn't caught up [with all diversity categories]. In those cases, use the Notes field in our catalog. Mention that your book has a *positive* description or use of diverse material. How *not* to do it: If you have a Christian book that refers to LGBT as a sin, that would not be a place to mention "LGBT positive." Some publishers email spreadsheets with diverse titles marked, and that's been very helpful. Also, mention diverse aspects in keywords.

IPG: We don't have an internal team to give us that information; we rely on you. Since BISAC codes have not caught up, you can mention in the keywords the specific diverse characters, setting, key plot points, etc.

B&T: Our team is creating many lists on diversity. Keywords are your door in there.

Q: Do you find that endorsements from other authors or influencers don't pull as much weight as a Booklist *or* PW *review?*

IPG: Not yet. For libraries who like authority, the professional review will carry more weight. A secondary niche title might benefit from one of those secondary endorsements.

Managing ebook collections

Authors who want to get into libraries need to be most aware of how ebooks have turned library budgets upside down. Most libraries now spend more money on ebooks than on print books. However, that money does not just go into ebooks. The multiplicity of ebook licenses means that libraries must pay for extra staff time to manage them.

Most commonly, an ebook may be sold to a library on a one-copy-one-use-forever purchase. This is desirable for many libraries for titles that don't circulate heavily but have an audience. Or it may be licensed to the library for a single year, with the understanding that if the ebook is out and four more patrons put a hold on the book, the library will order a second license on that

ebook. Or there are metered licenses: with the 100/100, you can license a book to be borrowed 100 times, but it can go out to 100 patrons all at once.

These peculiarities are further complicated, depending on whether an ebook was purchased from the publisher or licensed through Overdrive; whether published by an indie author, or published by a Big Four publisher or a small press. Worse, every ebook license, especially if it is not a one-copy-forever purchase, expires on a different day of the year. "Ebook collection management means triage." The librarian may terminate an ebook's license based on its relative popularity—"grading on a curve"—but they may also dump it *based on how easy its contract is to manage.*

Every day, the question is, "Which books do we drop?"

If we, as independent authors and small publishers, want to get into these markets and stay relevant to them, we must understand their administrative and budgetary challenges, choose our gateways of entry into library markets wisely, price our books competitively, and submit absolutely accurate metadata that allows them to find our ebooks among the millions on offer.

"Licensing changes can damage a book's availability and visibility as badly as poor metadata. Shifts in license [trends] caught some series in weird places and made random series volumes available differently."

"I encourage publishers to offer a couple of licenses at once. Try consumable access based on lends, which is more fair. 40/10 bundle of 40 borrows and up to 10 can be simultaneous. Five/five bundle of higher price per load but you can use them all at once, it's a sampler bundle. Bundles of 100 are great for big libraries with huge hold queues. Anything where it doesn't expire at a specific time. You can sell every book in your collection in a bundle, and they have an affordable deal."

"We saw a lot of pivoting during the pandemic. We ran a lot of inadvertent experiments that year. We had assumed that 'if there are holds on a title, that's where the demand is,' but that's not true. People will borrow literally anything if they don't have to put it on hold. We created packages of ebooks with all kinds of titles in them. We put as many books into these packages as possible. At the end of the first year, we asked, should we buy these again? Some [popular] titles went out thousands of times, but some of the weird ones went out a ton too, even [backlist] titles. We didn't realize that our entire budget had become focused on immediate demand. But people will borrow anything if it's immediately available."

This looks like an opportunity for indie authors in multi-author projects to create large bundles of ebooks for the library trade. Libraries can circulate (*and authors sell*) their entire catalog if they curate the books accessibly through metadata.

Jennifer Stevenson writes contemporary romcom, paranormal women's fiction, paranormal romcom, and humorous romantic fantasy.

Capstone Interview

Assuring the authentic voice in modern literature

By Cheré Coen

In January 2020, the novel *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins hit bookstores after months of positive reviews and being selected to Oprah's Book Club. Then Latinx critics called out the book detailing a Mexican bookseller crossing the U.S. border to escape a drug cartel as perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Cummins is not Mexican, although claims Puerto Rican heritage, and critics repeated what they had been saying all along, that authentic marginalized voices don't get published, but white authors writing about them do.

"Never in nearly two decades of writing about immigrants have I come across someone who resembles Cummins' heroine," wrote *Los Angeles Times* writer Esmeralda Bermudez in her commentary. "*American Dirt* is what happens when Latinos are shut out of the book industry."

Other critics joined in and the book tour was cancelled a week after the book's release. It amplified a movement—with critics on both sides—to assure authentic voices in literature.

"Looking back now, it's clear that the *American Dirt* debacle of January 2020 was a harbinger, the moment when the publishing world lost its confidence and ceded moral authority to the worst impulses of its detractors," wrote Pamela Paul in *The New York Times*. "Books that would once have been greenlit are now passed over; sensitivity readers are employed on a regular basis; self-censorship is rampant."

What constitutes authentic voice in literature? We asked Eris Young, a sensitivity reader and a queer, transgender writer of speculative fiction and nonfiction, to weigh in.

You must have watched the discussions of the past few years where books and authors were called out as not being authentic in their writing. What is your take on that?

Eris Young: The way I figure it, authors can write about whatever they want (no one is going to tell a multimillion bestseller author that they "can" or "can't" write something), but authors have a responsibility to be thinking critically about what they are writing, and why they want to tell the stories they are telling. This is called doing your due diligence, and in my

opinion any author with a modicum of self-respect should want to be both responsible and accurate with their subject matter. On the other side, authors should also be prepared, as culture-makers with huge social influence operating in a public sphere, to have their choices scrutinized, especially by the people with a personal stake in what the author is writing about.

You're a "sensitivity reader." Can you tell us what that entails?

EY: Nowadays I tend to use the term "authenticity reader," as sensitivity reader can sometimes put people's backs up, and I also think "authenticity" is a slightly more accurate descriptor of the work. But it's all different words for the same thing: a kind of consulting.

My SR or AR work tends to focus on queer and transgender representation, mostly in fiction because that is (most of) what I read and write. I also offer AR services relating to characters with ADHD.

When an author or a publisher contacts me in this capacity, I will usually ask them to first describe the story or project and what specifically they'd be looking for from me in terms of feedback. I've looked at entire books or just a single POV of a queer character in a novel with a larger cast of characters.

When I read, I look for things that feel implausible or unrealistic to me given my own lived experiences and my work in the community. I try to think first about how the material will come across to its audience, so I'm giving the author my thoughts as a queer and trans reader first and a researcher/writer/activist second. I pay attention to the plot and characterization details on the page, but also to the way the narrative as a whole treats that character: for example, is the queer character killed off first? Is the trans character only ever portrayed as miserable and insecure? Do the queer characters have any interiority, or are they just used as props or set dressing?

The advice I give an author is almost never "don't do this" or "cut that." Usually the feedback I am giving is to point out places where a cis(gender) or straight author has inadvertently reproduced a stereotype or a harmful trope, and to suggest a way to treat their queer or trans character—*and by extension their queer or trans readers*—with a little more compassion or nuance.

Does authentic voice only refer to different cultures or also different backgrounds?

EY: In my view, it can refer to all sorts of things, even beyond a person's lived experience. I don't see AR work as a "new thing" necessarily, but instead see it as a natural progression of the kinds of research decent authors have been doing since writing fiction became a profession, which is to learn about something in order to be able to portray it in your writing accurately.

The thing that I think has changed in recent years is that authors themselves have started to see "a specific group of peoples' lived experience" as something that merits being researched and written about responsibly. There's a robust tradition of, for example, Western writers viewing marginalized or colonized peoples' lives as free real estate to play around in, without regard for those people as human beings. So, while I wouldn't necessarily contact an SR to tell me if the physics in my sci-fi story was accurate, I would ask a physicist, and I consider this type of work to be different shades of the same thing.

The saying is "write what you know" but I've heard female romance authors say that they're not men and that's half the novel. Does authentic voice depend on the audience?

EY: I think it does depend on audience. A writer whose audience are almost exclusively (for example) straight white older men will probably get away with writing a queer person or a woman less-than-authentically. The fact that *American Dirt* became a bestseller anyways demonstrates this.

I think what it comes down to is that it's an honor system, and that there is a difference between a straight woman writing a straight man's POV and a straight woman writing two gay men. The difference has to do with the stakes involved: no one is going to be harmed if the straight man isn't "written accurately," but if the gay men are written in a lazy way that perpetuates harmful stereotypes in the minds of straight readers, then that has the potential to do harm in the real world by coloring how that reader thinks of and therefore treats gay men.

Do you think the bigger picture here is publishing those marginalized authors the publishing industry has ignored?

EY: I think what is going to happen over the next few decades is that we are going to see historical trends reversing or being mitigated, and those authors whose voices have been ignored will be published more and more. That is what a truly more equal industry will look like, and I think that uplifting marginalized people and removing the barriers that stand in the way of us making a living as writers should be the "end goal" of any diversity work or changes made to the industry. However, it's also not reasonable to expect that every author will be writing characters with their exact intersections of identity. Marginalized authors themselves also use authenticity readers!

Do you think the publishing world advanced in the last few years to publish more marginalized voices?

EY: While I think marginalized people, and young people at lower levels in the books business, are very much aware and concerned with the way the industry allows certain voices to be heard and not others, the power-holders in the industry, the people with money, are still not very concerned with who is telling those stories. Though, this may be changing. I keep getting contacted to do work for major publishers. Generally speaking, I do think we are seeing change but it is bottom-up and therefore slow-moving.

*You write speculative fiction and nonfiction books on human sexuality (*They/Them/Their *and* Ace Voices*), are you seeing an increase in books from and about the LGBTQ+ community?*

EY: Absolutely, yes. There are entire publishers, for example, the brilliant Cipher Press based in the UK, who are devoted to publishing books by and about LGBTQ+ people. My own publisher, Jessica Kingsley, has an entire catalog devoted to gender diversity.

What advice would you give writers?

EY: Try to look at your own assumptions and the biases you might have received from the world around you; it's not your fault if there is an area you aren't an expert in or a type of lived experience you don't have, but it is your responsibility to educate yourself and think critically about your subject matter, especially when the stakes are high.

If you are working with an SR, try to remember that their feedback can only strengthen your work. Remember the SR is responding to what you have written and not to you as a person, and they want to help your work be the best it can be.

Cheré Coen is a travel journalist who writes romances and mysteries under the pen name Cherie Claire. Her latest—in addition to working through a master's in creative writing—is the Viola Valentine paranormal mystery series.

Genre In-Depth
Science Fiction

By Malorie Cooper

A branch of speculative fiction, science fiction is considered to have been created by Mary Shelley when she published *Frankenstein* in 1818. In its most basic form, sci-fi has always dealt with that "What if?" question that has been present in stories since the first group of humans used speech to share tales around a campfire.

The only difference, of course, is a not-so-slight nuance.

"What if science…?"

While Mary Shelley's tale was set in her own time, sci-fi authors have long attempted to peer through the veil of time, imagining what may come and how it may change us, either bringing people together, pulling us apart, or some other alteration to our current status quo.

Major science fiction subgenres include:

- Dystopian/post-apocalyptic
- Time travel
- Technothrillers
- Military sci-fi
- Colonization/first contact/space exploration
- Metaphysical
- Space opera

Most of these are generally self-explanatory, but for those not familiar, metaphysical stories often deal with the evolution of humans and/or AI into more than just the simple three-dimensional, time-restricted beings we are now. Space opera, on the other hand, is less cerebral, and more like a large-scope Western in space. *Star Wars* is one of the quintessential space opera stories.

Because a science fiction story can be about anything from a new type of wristwatch that changes how people behave, to a galactic war against aliens set a million years in the future, knowing both one's subgenre and how to convey that subgenre through cover, title, and blurb is very important.

Know your subgenre and tropes

Imagine walking into the bookstore (or browsing books online—which is far more likely) and seeing a host of covers depicting everything from spaceships broadsiding one another to a zombie horde with antennas on their heads tearing through a mall.

Both are science fiction, but they have entirely different readerships. Ensuring that a cover attracts exactly the right readers is paramount in a genre like sci-fi. Likewise, authors also need to ensure that their covers filter out readers who don't match up.

Luckily, for most of us (regardless of genre), we have a bit of an innate sense when it comes to cover art—largely because we're readers too.

For example, I love far-future science fiction. I want to read about people exploring unknown reaches of the galaxy, widely separated from any of the concerns of the 21st century world. For me, that's maximum escapism. I want to read about their wit and cunning, and how scientific advances are cleverly used to deal with the situations they encounter.

Because of this, I look for big, fancy spaceships on book covers. That's a clear signal that the book is far-future and bound to fulfill my personal reading needs—granted, I may pick up that cover with radio-controlled zombies too. I mean … who wouldn't have their interest piqued by *that* cover art.

For example, if an author were to write a book about a far-future society on a distant planet with some decent amount of space travel, but the cover art shows a person in a slightly post-modern city, I'd likely not pick it up because I will think it's near-future and taking place on Earth. However, a person who loves near-future, Earth-based science fiction may pick it up because the cover appeals, yet ultimately be disappointed.

There's no manual…

Unlike some of the more focused genres, there is no standard structure for how science-fiction books work—other than the reader expects a solid climax and satisfying conclusion.

In many ways, science fiction is less of a genre and more of a setting. A sci-fi romance needs to follow romance rules—but in a sci-fi setting. A military story must have many of the same elements as a modern military story, following military readers' expectations—but in a sci-fi setting. SF cozy? Same thing. Adventure? Thriller? Whatever? Yup, follow those rules, but put it in a science fiction setting.

Your most important character

If I ask you to think of the first non-character thing that comes to mind when I say "*Star Trek*," chances are that you're going to think of the ships. Specifically, the *Enterprise*.

The *Enterprise* (any of them, really) is absolutely a character in the show. It has its own personality, quirks, and the viewers form an attachment to it. Whenever one is writing fiction

that is defined by setting, the setting itself is a character that needs to be well-developed and fleshed out just like any other.

I would even dare say that the setting is if not *the* most important character, it's at least the second most important. As the author, you always need to thoroughly understand your setting, but with science fiction (and fantasy as well) you need to understand it exceptionally well or you will fail at the most important part of writing science fiction: achieving suspension of disbelief.

Good science fiction is going to have a "What if?" question in it that pushes the boundaries of what is currently known to be true. Whether it's that a wormhole opens up inside the moon or that there are multiple alien factions fighting a covert war on Earth, it's the author's job to get the reader to say, "Okay, sure, I'll bite. Let's see where this goes."

Poorly constructed setting will cause readers to retract that statement, because weak setting will manifest as inconsistency inside the story. Maybe in one place the text says that the aliens arrived 2,000 years ago, but another place says they arrived after the fall of Rome. People will notice that sort of discrepancy (as well as subtler issues). Each inconsistency is a crack in the wall that is holding back the reader's disbelief in your core "What if?"

Too many cracks will bring that wall down.

So take time to build out that setting. Then, when the time comes to write, you'll drop your characters into it, give them a starting point and ask, "Well? What are you going to do next?" The characters will take off, able to operate within their clearly defined surroundings. The readers will notice because it will add depth and consistency, and those are two of the most important things you need to hold a science fiction reader's attention.

Well…that and a really good "What if?"

Malorie (M. D.) Cooper is the author of over 125 science fiction novels, nearly all of which take place in her Aeon 14 universe. She has been publishing since 2012 and worked as a full-time author since late 2016. With a background in software engineering, she worked hard to bring accurate science to her stories while still maintaining a strong focus on characters (they're what people really stick around for) that her fans love. Her ultimate goal is to create one of the largest science-fiction universes in existence, and she's well on her way!

Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle

*This year of Smart Marketing
is all reinventing our businesses.
For the fourth quarter, we'll cover:
How to maximize author learning;
Lanes, trends, and opportunities;
Planning for the new year!*

As I write this column, we're less than two weeks from the kick-off of the NINC 2023 annual conference. This year, our theme is ELEVATE, and as both the programming chair for this year and the ongoing assistant conference director, I've had a great deal of time to ponder that idea.

NINC was the very first author-education conference I ever attended. I'd taken some online courses before that, but I'd never been in the kind of author learning environment that our event offers. I remember sitting in that very first session; it was back when we still did First Word, and the entire ballroom was open, full of attendees, while a panel of people I'd never heard of sat up front and expounded on the state of publishing.

I remember feeling overwhelmed and underqualified. All I had done was write some books and publish them myself. Sure, I'd also learned an insane amount about website set-up, newsletters, social media, book covers, formatting, blog tours, and other marketing, but no one was talking about any of those things during that first scary session.

I was tempted to hide in my room for the rest of the conference—I reasoned that I could at least get a lot of writing done, if nothing else!—but luckily for me, before the conference began, I'd attended the UnCon (I *think* it was the first time the UnCon was held in conjunction with NINC, but I'm not positive on that). At UnCon, I'd connected with a few authors who were far savvier and smarter than me—and they didn't let me run away and hide.

Over the next few days of that conference, I found that most of the sessions were exactly what I needed to hear. I took copious notes, spent endless hours talking with other authors about what we'd just heard, and then after the conference was over, I drove home and thought … now what?

I had notebooks filled with ideas and information, but I wasn't sure what to do with them. I'd gotten advice and input from other authors, but I didn't really know how to implement any of it. I felt a little at sea.

In the years since my first NINC, I've tried to be more thoughtful and intentional about my author learning experiences and how I put what I've learned into practice. While you're reading this a few weeks after this year's event, I hope you can still take away some value for your own conference experiences.

- Notes are great! But how you take them is important. I realized after my first NINC that while I probably absorbed some information more fully by handwriting it, it was more difficult to review that way. Also, because one of the ways in which I disseminate knowledge is through discussion with others and I couldn't easily share those handwritten notes with my author friends, I felt a little stymied. So going forward, I've always taken notes on my laptop, using a Google doc for easy sharing.
- I also try to leave a little time at the end of a session, or worst case, at the end of the day, to review the notes and highlight what struck me as most applicable to me. I might be impressed by certain nuggets of information, but if they're not going to work for my own author journey, they're not much use.
- I had an epiphany a few years ago that impacted not only how I attend conferences but also how I plan them: workshops mean next to nothing if attendees can't take away anything actionable. So, when I highlight my notes, I also add bullet points to the end of the page with possible actions I can take going forward based on what I've learned in that workshop.
- Conversation is huge. As I noted above, for me, digesting information is easier when I can do it in conjunction with others. That's why I love the Tiki Bar at NINC, as well as our NINC After Dark roundtables—and it's also why I launched a Post-Con event in 2022. Sitting for a day with a small group of authors who may have attended different sessions than I did and hearing their particular viewpoints is helpful. I reopen my notes and add their takeaways to my own.
- Recognizing that not everything I learned is applicable to my own path, or perhaps to my point in the path, is essential. I love the idea of foreign translations and being more proactive on audiobooks, but at the moment, focusing my energy there would not be productive. Just because information is valuable and true doesn't mean it works for everyone.
- Once I am home again, I give myself a few days to decompress before I open those notes. Once I do, I also open my calendar and a blank doc page. I start a list of those actionable items that I'd noted at the end of each session, grouping them into what can be done immediately, what should be done within three months, six months, nine

months, or a year. And then I add sub-bullets under each item, breaking down the tasks that have to be done in conjunction with that item. (Thank you, Sarra Cannon and HB90 for teaching me this process!!) Once I have those lists, I add them to my calendar.

We live in a marvelous age of author conferences, online courses, and virtual events. We could almost be in "school" every single week, if we wanted. But none of it makes a difference without a plan of action and sense of intention.

I hope that if you attended this year's conference, you're already putting all of our fabulous gleaned knowledge into action—making it work for you!

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.

The Mad Scribbler

Conference Takeaways

By Laura Resnick

"Would it not be wise for us to have another conference... and the sooner the better."
—Winston Churchill

The NINC conference is over for another year, and the conference committee is already brainstorming plans for next year. Here are some of my takeaways from NINC: ELEVATE.

Pace yourself

Unexpectedly, I'm a lot older than I used to be.

As I staggered up to my room before 10 p.m. most nights at this year's NINC conference, sober and exhausted, I thought, "I never used to do this."

I can remember many NINC conferences where I stayed up late in the hotel bar every night talking with colleagues, got up early to have breakfast with friends before workshops began for the day, and barely slept at all. But most of that was—ye gods!—decades ago. I was possibly the youngest member of NINC back when I joined in late 1989, while the organization was forming; but now I'm a NINC elder... and it's time for me to learn to pace myself when I'm at the conference.

It's a fact that was easy for me to recognize this year not only because of how exhausted I was at the end of each day, but also because the need to *pace oneself* was one of the major themes I noticed at this year's conference.

Several speakers framed the issue as looming burnout, and there was high attendance at workshops that focused on reclaiming the joy of writing or protecting one's own mental health. As it happens, for someone who's been around as long as I have, these are old topics.

One prominent cause of burnout has remained a constant for years: the pressure on authors to write faster and faster, to release book after book after book at a rapid pace—and the threat of failure if you don't or can't comply. Indeed, much of the attraction to AI that I heard voiced at

the conference seems to be its potential to increase a writer's speed or frequency of new releases, or to enable a writer to maintain her current crushing speed but without the same level of exhaustion. (However, at least one writer I know perked up upon learning that AI might be able to write sex scenes, meaning she'd never again have to write another one. So speed isn't the only reason people are interested in it.)

This pressure is real, and it's not unique to the indie world. Although the pace of a writer defined as "fast" with "frequent releases" in the indie world is head-spinning, the pressure to write faster has been a common source of fatigue, stress, anxiety, and/or burnout in the traditional publishing world ever since I sold my first book in February of 1988. After I accepted the publisher's offer, the next thing the editor said to me was, "Can you write four books a year?" (For a while, I wrote three per year.)

The paradox there, of course, is that traditional publishing conversely wants to publish many writers far *less* frequently than they can deliver books at what is, for them, a comfortable pace. Or far fewer books than a writer believes she *should* release every year because she feels pressure from peers, articles, workshops, and other writers' success stories to write faster than her publisher is willing to publish her and, more to the point, faster than she feels she actually *can* write—or can write well, or write the way she wants to, or write while still having a life and her sanity.

An indie writer is also an entrepreneur (or authorpreneur), and the demanding workload of being your own publisher, promoter, art director, and business manager as well as writing the actual books is another common cause of exhaustion or burnout.

This isn't an entirely new issue, either, because ever since I got into this profession as a wide-eyed zygote back in the days of typewriters and snail mail, writers in traditional publishing have been coping with the exhaustion and expense of doing much of their own PR and promotion because their publishers don't do it; battling with publishers over terrible covers, deranged editing notes, illiterate copy edits, and typesetting that manages to delete whole chapters; searching again and again and yet again for a new agent after the most-recent one didn't work out; and strategizing how to grow a career and develop a bigger audience while dealing with corporations that seem determined to ensure the exact opposite happens to their careers.

Different problems, same shoals ahead: stress, anxiety, exhaustion, burnout.

So one of my biggest takeaways from the conference was that it is essential for each writer to find a pace that works for them. The solution will be different for each individual, as will be the tools they use, and the right pace for each person may change as their circumstances change.

Do what you love, avoid what you hate

Underlying the theme of burnout, I thought numerous speakers—and also various audience members—offered good advice about pacing oneself and protecting one's sanity.

One piece of advice I heard over and over in this year's sessions was, essentially, do the things you're good at, like doing, and/or want to do, and avoid doing the things you dislike, aren't good at, or don't understand.

I attended a number of sessions that addressed this topic across multiple career levels. If your budget means you need to do everything yourself as an authorpreneur, then pick a few things you like doing, because that will be the best use of your time, energy, and focus; whereas doing things you don't like doing will take you longer and wear you out—and that will be a drag on your writing. I thought it was freeing to hear that there's no point in doing something that worked well for someone *else* if you'd rather eat ground glass than do it. It wouldn't be cost-effective in terms of your focus, time, and energy; and when doing something you hate or aren't good at, you're unlikely to get the same result as a totally different person who likes doing it or does it well.

If you think of it in terms of, "I will spend this year writing in a genre I hate to read and don't want to write," the logic of *not* doing that seems self-evident.

Similarly, the consistent advice across all sessions I attended was, if there's something you don't like or don't want to do but feel you really *should* do, then *pay someone else to do it*.

Various speakers gave many good examples of this, and NINC's conference sponsors and industry guests offer all sorts of services that cover those bases. But I thought the best example I heard came from an audience member (I don't know who, since she was about eight rows behind me): She wants to know what her readers are getting out of her books, what they think, what does or doesn't come across to them, etc., but she can't stand reading reader reviews; so she pays someone else to read the reviews and give her a report.

I thought that was smart, outside-the-box thinking. There's something seemingly minor (reading reader reviews) that this author doesn't like to do and doesn't want to do, so she doesn't do it. But she wants to access that potentially valuable information about reader reaction to her work. It's a task someone else can do, and it's one that almost anyone can afford to *pay* someone else to do. By farming out that task, the author is protecting her time, focus, and energy—and also her mental health. (If I had $10 for every time I told an anguished writer to stop reading their reader reviews, I'd be rich beyond the dreams of avarice.)

The side chatter needs to stop

To be blunt, I was shocked by the rudeness of too many NINC members during the workshops this year.

In at least half the sessions I attended, people talked while the speaker was talking. I don't mean one person said to another, "Can I borrow your pen?" I mean that *whole conversations* were regularly going on around me while the speaker was talking.

In a session on direct sales, three people sitting behind me talked nonstop through nearly the entire workshop. In a session on craft, two people directly in front of me and also two people in the row behind me talked nearly the entire time, *and* two people sitting at the end of my aisle, eight chairs away from me, talked so loudly throughout the workshop that I occasionally missed what the speaker was saying.

Moreover, it wasn't just a few bad apples. In some sessions, a *lot* of attendees viewed the Q&A period as a time to chat with each other, so that a loud hum of conversations dominated the room while audience members were asking questions and the speaker was replying.

People, that is *rude*. That's bad manners. It's self-absorbed and inconsiderate.

It's not only inconsiderate to attendees who are in the session to listen to the speaker (and not to *you*), it's incredibly *rude to the speaker*.

If you think they don't notice your behavior, then I can only assume you've recently been dropped on your head. The rooms are well-lighted and not that big, and the speakers can clearly see and hear you yammering while they're speaking. They are people, not robots, and they're in the room with you, not holographic projections.

The time for chatting is in the lobby, the courtyard, the Tiki Bar, the beach, a restaurant... anywhere *but* a room with a speaker who is a guest of NINC and currently speaking.

So please, if you want to talk: don't attend the session; or leave the room; or use the impulse control one reasonably expects of a professional adult and wait until the session is over before you dive into conversation with your companions.

———————————————

Laura Resnick is a past president of NINC, past conference chair, past outreach chair, past assistant editor of Nink, past co-chair of the site selection committee, and past Authors Coalition representative.

NINC Member Discounts

Jones House Creative and Plottr

By Abigail Drake

We have **two fabulous discounts** to highlight this month.

The first is from Jones House Creative. They've worked with authors for over 13 years and love helping them grow their readerships, connect with their fans, and market their writing through their websites, social media, and newsletter lists. They know how much of a challenge it can be for an author to stay focused on craft and try to design, build, and maintain a website (not to mention grow social media platforms), so their whole focus is to lift that burden and let authors do what they do best—write.

Jones House is offering an incredible **15% off** discount, as well as two months of website maintenance for customers who sign up for an annual website maintenance plan, and **one free year** of website hosting for new website hosting customers or customers who transfer their hosting to them (with a two-year minimum hosting agreement). A great offer for our members!

The other discount we're featuring this month is from Plottr. Used by 20,000+ professional and aspiring authors, Plottr gives you back control over your creative process. The software helps you visually organize your book and series arcs, track all of your character and location details, and even revise existing drafts. It's flexible, it's fun, and it's all in one place.

Plottr also offers color coding, custom filters, search, and a vast library of plot and character templates to unlock those elusive "aha!" moments that elevate your creativity and push you through to "The End." It's uniquely designed to make you look at your story in a new way, and they are also offering a very generous **15% off** discount to our members.

For more info on these and other wonderful offers, check out the Freebies and Discounts section of our website.

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, who 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):
- Ninclink, email list for all NINC members
- NINC Facebook group
- Follow NINC on Twitter
- NINC on Clubhouse: Novelists, Inc. Virtual Tiki Bar
- NINK Critique/brainstorming group
- Traditionally published authors
- Swords & Ray Guns: SF/F & speculative fiction writers
- Authors of thriller/crime/suspense
- Cover Creators: Discuss creating book covers

Conference:
Conference information

Newsletter
- Propose an article
- Submit a letter to the editor
- Newsletter archives

Website (You must be logged in to access these services.)
- Legal Fund
- Sample Letters
- Articles & Links

Member discounts
NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at 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: 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
- President-Elect: Caethes Faron
- Secretary: Sylvia McDaniel
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Steven Womack

Advisory Council
- Lou Aronica
- Brenda Hiatt Barber
- Linda Barlow
- Jean Brashear
- Meredith Efken
- Donna Fletcher

- Lisa Hughey
- Tawdra Kandle
- Barbara Keiler
- Julie Leto
- Pat McLaughlin
- Pat Rice
- Erica Ridley
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

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
    - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
    - Assistant Conf. Director & Programming Chair: Tawdra Kandle
    - Assistant Programming Chair: Dylann Crush
    - Trad Liaison: Lou Aronica
    - Sponsorship Chair: Sarah Woodbury
    - Assistant Sponsorship Chair: Hallee Bridgeman
    - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
    - Assistant Hotel Liaison: Tegan Maher
    - Registrar: Lisa Hughey
    - Assistant Registrar: Stephanie Julian
    - App Coordinator & Graphic Designer: Laura Hayden
    - NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley
- Authors Coalition Representatives
    - Chair: Rebecca Zanetti
    - Hallee Bridgeman
    - Lynn Morrison
- Bookkeeper: Christy Wilson
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
    - Chair: Celeste Barclay
    - Misti Boehm
    - Pooks Burroughs
    - Malorie Cooper
    - Lynn Emery
    - Lisa Hughey
    - Tawdra Kandle
    - Ellis Leigh
    - Alison Perry
    - Harper St. George

- Social Media Committee
    - Chair: Violet Howe
    - Genevieve Jack
- Membership Committee
    - Boyd Craven
    - Sarah Woodbury
- *Nink* Newsletter
    - Editor: Harper St. George
    - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
    - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
    - Production Manager: Laura Resnick
- Nominating Committee
    - Chair: Lisa Hughey
    - Tanya Anne Crosby
    - 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
Address changes may be made on the website.

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    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.