A Week in the Life of a Copywriter

By ELIZA SHALLCROSS

Seven years ago, right before the birth of my son, I left a full-time position as an acquiring editor at Silhouette. Walker Books had just published my first Regency romance in hardcover, so I thought I would split my time between baby rearing and fiction writing. Since I'd written a fair amount of copy while I was at Silhouette, I decided I'd augment my income with part-time, freelance copywriting, at least until writing fiction made me solvent. The fiction has still not paid off, but I've found the freelance copywriting biz is a great way to stay abreast of the paperback market while actually earning money.

In most mass-market paperback houses, cover copy is not an editorial responsibility; it is assigned to a copy department whose sole responsibility is the production of copy. The person or people in that department hire freelancers to write any copy there isn't time to write in-house, trafficking the appropriate material to them, and making sure that the copy produced is acceptable to editorial and marketing.

When a publishing company decides to use a freelancer, I come into the picture. Typically, I'll get a call from the copy department, asking whether I’m free to handle a book. If I’m free, they’ll overnight materials on the book. Ideally, I get a complete manuscript. Sometimes, however, I get as little as a two-page synopsis and a few reviews of the author's previous books. I’m given a deadline, usually a week from when I receive them.

More Simply Human

By TRACY KNIGHT

Horror fiction deals in aberrations: aberrations of nature and circumstance, of fate and destiny, aberrations of the cosmic and the exquisitely human. Of these facets, the most memorable and compelling are the human beings who populate the writer’s fictional world. Through their eyes the reader is able to behold existence from a unique and unexpected perspective. With those characters the reader is able to experience a fellow human's endeavor to understand, avoid, or defeat an unimaginable reality, a loathsome monster, or a mind-bending situation.

Creating believable characters who invite a reader's identification and investment is the hallmark of effective writing of every genre. In horror fiction this can be particularly challenging, since in so many ways the writer is asking us to accept and embrace the unreal. For this reason, characterization in horror writing is central to a story's success.

Characters who embody the struggles and tragedies and terrors of mental disorders—from eccentricities of personality to psychoses—are widespread in horror fiction, no matter whether they are the protagonist or, as is the case all too often, the malevolent horror itself. When they are effectively developed, nurtured into completeness, these characters become the centerpieces of unforgettable short stories or novels. Consider Norman Bates in Robert Bloch's Psycho; Hannibal Lecter in Thomas Harris's The Silence of the Lambs; the stark, chilling, and sometimes comedic psychopaths in J. N. Williamson's The Book of Websters; and the almost alien derangement of George Smith in Theodore Sturgeon's Some of Your Blood. As a clinical psychologist, I am interested in how writers portray personality types and mental disorders, which are frequently integral to horror stories. However, with alarming frequency authors make basic errors that interfere with the enjoyment of their fiction. Perhaps because we all possess our very own personal psychology, we tend to assume that we know how human difficulties and insanity manifest themselves, and how they are expressed in thought, perception, and behavior. Couple this with the strange and inaccurate portrayals of psychological difficulties in media of all ilk and you have a recipe for a myriad of fictional missteps.

Yet, in order to create compelling characters who accurately portray human personality types and mental disorders, a writer need not pursue an ad

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Agents, agents everywhere...

Have you ever noticed how someone can mention something to you and suddenly that very thing is popping up everywhere? That's the way it's been lately with the subject of agents.

NINC has always been concerned with agent issues, of course. Whether to have one or not—who and how to pick—when and how to leave—those kinds of questions are critical to many of our members as they go about building and defining their writing careers. Twice we've published agent guides (the last time in 1996) and we've considered doing another edition. We've heard that's a fabulous idea, while others sing the Been There, Done That/Hum blues.

So what's the problem? I hope you all saw Lois Kleinsasser's letter to the editor in last month's Novelists' Ink. Lois refers to growing sentiment that it's getting tough to find an agent, even for well-published authors. If I read her letter properly, she wonders whether NINC ought to be working harder, networking better, as well as offering insight into the LA side of the business, literary lawyers and managers.

It's all very intriguing, especially when you consider what else is going on in the world of entertainment representation. Everyone's heard about John Grisham's well-publicized problems, but Garry Shandling, TV's Larry Sanders, took things one step further with a $100 million breach-of-contract action against his former manager, and then added a withering send-up. Writing well is the best revenge, apparently, at least until the court battles are settled.

The trades are also full of the CAA-Michael Ovitz brouhaha, wherein former super-agent Ovitz and his new talent management company have gone head-to-head with CAA. Creative Artists issued an ultimatum to its clients, warning them to stay away from Ovitz/AMG or get dropped. But several stars have chosen Ovitz, preferring the total package approach rather than the more restrictive services of a plain old agency. Sure, the film biz is different from ours, but some pundits see this trend signaling the beginning of the end for the traditional LA agencies like ICM, William Morris and CAA, with actors, directors and writers included.

On one coast agencies are threatened by management groups, and on the other, by technology. In a recent issue of Publishers Weekly, Richard Curtis talked about electronic publishing, warning, "[I]f authors can establish direct access with readers, what do they need publishers—or agents—for?" While some of us may think that sounds great, others tremble at the very idea. Do without an agent? You've got to be kidding!

I think the real problem right now is that we are facing some fundamental changes in the way we do business. Mergers, technology and major shifts in consumer habits are sweeping us and our agents to new places, whether we want to go or not. No one knows yet where we're going to end up.

So what can NINC do in times like these? We've already started a few
things—such as adding the "Ask the Agent" column to the newsletter. We're also hoping to put more agent information on the website, www.ninc.com. This could be a tremendous and exciting project, and we're hoping it will strike a chord for a few of you out there. If could be incredibly useful to you personally, if you want the chance to interact with some agents and see the information first-hand, as well as help determine what form it takes online. Let your voice be heard! Contact any Board member over there on the masthead. We may not know where any of us will end up, but together, maybe we can lessen the anxiety a little!

NINC news

Once again, we welcome a new Board member to the fold, and bid a fond farewell to someone we're really going to miss. After two-plus years of terrific service as secretary, Candace Schuler is stepping down, and Becky Barker has been kind enough to step in. Candace won't be leaving us completely, since we've already got her tapped for a few projects, but we hope you'll join us in sending Candace your warmest wishes and appreciation for a job well done.

– Julie Kistler

Correction

Due to miscommunication and some overeagerness on the part of your editor (yes, that's me [groan!]), the February NINK incorrectly stated that the AAR had agreed to participate in our new "Ask the Agent" column. This impression was incorrect.

The opinions offered in "Ask The Agent" will be solely those of the interviewed agents. We do, however, hope to ask the AAR to recommend agents to answer specialized questions for us. TdR

Midnight in the Garden, But Three Days in Savannah!

In this month’s issue of Novelists’ Ink you will find the introductory brochure for the 1999 Novelists, Inc. Conference in Savannah. We’ve got lots of exciting stuff already planned, and you’ll be hearing more about the details of the program and speakers in later issues of NINK. For now, we can tell you some of the highlights of this year’s conference:

• We have confirmed our luncheon speaker, bestselling author Ann Maxwell, aka Elizabeth Lowell, who will be speaking on the topic, “Popular Fiction: Why We Write It and Why We Read It.”

• Reduced Conference Fee! After consulting with the NINC Board of Directors, we have decided to use some of our Author’s Coalition Funds to subsidize the conference so we can keep the high quality of speakers and at the same time make the conference more affordable for our members.

• More Networking Opportunities: Our members really love the unique opportunity that NINC affords them to network with their peers, and we have increased the number of Author Discussion groups to allow more interaction between our members. We will still be offering outside speakers, but they will be scheduled at a different time during the conference, so nothing will interfere with our “Authors Only” sessions.

• Free time to see the City: NINC’s official conference activities don’t start until 4:00 pm on Thursday, giving you time to travel that day and spend some time in the City as well. On Saturday afternoon, we have also allowed free time for excursions and/or visiting with friends, editors, or agents. We will be offering attendees a menu of options for spending that time, including walking, driving, boat and trolley tours of the city.

Opportunities abound to mingle with old friends or make new ones.

I’d also like to introduce you to our other Conference Committee Members:

Program Chair Jasmine Cresswell will be planning the discussion group topics and enlisting guest speakers. Send your suggestions straight to her.

Editor/Agent Liaison Sandra Kitt will be in charge of making sure the editors and agents are invited and are enlisted to take part in the conference. If you hear of someone who would like to be invited, please let her know.

Registration Chair Vicki Hinze will be processing your registrations later in the year.

Special thanks to these ladies for taking on these very important duties.

SAVANNAH TRIVIA: James Lord Pierpont was living in Savannah when he composed the classic ditty “The One Horse Open Sleigh,” which was, for marketing reasons, later re-titled “Jingle Bells.” Only slightly less famous is another Savannah songwriter, Johnny Mercer, author of “Moon River,” “Days of Wine and Roses,” and—as much as he would probably like to deny it—“Jeepers Creepers.”

Mark your calendar, make your hotel reservations and plan to join us for an unforgettable weekend in Savannah!

– Victoria Thompson, Conference Coordinator
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vanced degree. The necessary tools with which to build such characters are literally at one's fingertips. Adding these resources to your existing ability to create characters will sharpen your proficiency to integrate human aberrations into your horror fiction, thus fashioning characters who not only are beyond the norm of most readers' experience, but believable as well.

I hasten to add that this is not a call to create characters with mental disorders to merely add color and strangeness to your stories. Rather, these characters are used so frequently, I'm only interested in it being done more accurately and, ultimately, more humanly. Therefore, I hope that what you have learned about creating compelling characters—through your reading, education, and experience—can be enhanced through the ideas presented here.

In the past six months, I've read works of horror fiction (all by spectacular writers) in which: a schizophrenic switches personalities helplessly, from priest to murderer to three-year-old child; a severely depressed law enforcement officer engages in car chases, leaps from building rooftops and pursues suspects, all with incredible energy; a "psychotic killer" methodically plans a series of murders with clarity and an extraordinary lack of emotion; a psychologist laments the fact that she cannot treat mental illness since psychologists are only trained to work with family relationships, then later injects a patient with medication as part of his treatment. What do all of these examples have in common? They are wrong.

They rest on foundations of inaccurate information, thus splintering the seamless dream the writer is attempting to create.

To quickly address each of the above-mentioned errors:

(1) **Schizophrenia and Multiple Personality Disorder (Now Termed Dissociative Identity Disorder) Are Distinct Clinical Entities.** Please write this down in large block letters in your notebook. If I accomplish nothing else in this article other than to reduce the grotesque number of times this error is made, I will consider my existence on this planet well-spent.

Schizophrenia is a devastating mental illness which may manifest as hallucinations, delusions, disorganized speech and behavior, social withdrawal and dulling of emotional responses. While the term "schizophrenia" is derived from Greek words meaning "split mind" (which may be where the confusion originally arose), a more accurate definition is "shattered mind." The split is not between personalities; it is between Self and World. The boundaries blur, or even vanish. Thus an internal image becomes an external phenomenon; an idea becomes a worldly truth.

What has been known as Multiple Personality Disorder is marked by the presence of two or more distinct personalities which repeatedly take control of an individual's behavior, often with the activities of one personality remaining virtually unknown to another. Even more interesting is the debate in psychology and psychiatry on the prevalence and actual existence of this syndrome as a pure disorder; a growing number of professionals and researchers in the field believe that this disorder can be inadvertently created or encouraged in psychotherapy.

(2) **A Severely Depressed Man Would Not Likely Have the Physical Energy to Engage in James Bondian Adventures.** Cardinal signs of a major depression include loss of interest and motivation, difficulty in concentrating, diminished energy and feelings of worthlessness, none of which is particularly conducive to the spirited pursuit of a quarry.

(3) **A Psychotic Killer and a Psychopathic Killer Are Not Synonymous.** A psychotic person has experienced a break with reality, likely including delusions and hallucinations (and on the whole is less likely to be dangerous than the rest of us, by the way), while the common use of the term "psychopathic" refers to an irredeemably antisocial individual who is impulsive, deceitful, aggressive, and has little to no conscience or empathy.

(4) **A Psychologist Treats Mental Illness.** Although most psychologists have doctorate degrees (e.g., Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D.), they are not medical doctors and don't prescribe or administer medication. However, their central function in a clinical setting is the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders through assessment and psychotherapy. There is perhaps no stronger and odder commentary on the portrayal of mental health professionals in the media than the observation that Bob Newhart's sitcom character was perhaps the most accurate.

A psychiatrist is someone who has earned an M.D. degree, then goes on to specialize in the medical treatment of mental illness. It is the psychiatrist who prescribes and monitors the use of psychotropic medications.

These inaccuracies represent common errors writers make when including psychological terms in their fiction. However, as is the case in the whole of life, it is much easier to point out errors and mistakes than it is to chart a positive course. As I have often told my clients, "If blame cured anyone, we'd all be perfect by now." In the remainder of this article, therefore, I will offer horror writers a few suggestions on how to more successfully integrate human aberrations into their fiction.

**Invest in a Copy of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.** The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM;* in its Fourth Edition as I
write this) is the standard diagnostic reference for psychiatry and psychology. Used by researchers, clinicians and insurance companies to approach some consensus about the definitions and signs of various mental disorders, and to facilitate communication among professionals, the later editions of this manual offer clear and concise listings of the symptoms and characteristics of everything from childhood disorders to organic brain syndromes, from psychotic disorders to anxiety disorders, from sexual disorders to personality disorders. This book can be a treasure for the writer seeking to portray human psychological difficulties accurately, in that it contains not only basic descriptions of currently recognized mental disorders, but also enhances these descriptions with information on the prevalence, course and associated features of the difficulties.

It is important to recognize that unlike standard medical diagnosis, psychiatric diagnosis undergoes constant change as new evidence emerges to help shape our understanding of human difficulties. Did you know, for example that homosexuality is no longer a psychiatric diagnosis, or that neurosis as a concept has all but disappeared from current diagnostic formulations? Because of the changes in diagnosis which occur over time, if you are writing a story set in a time other than the present, it will prove valuable to research the psychiatric diagnosis that existed at the time of the story. For example, in Ed Gorman’s The Marilyn Tapes, Marilyn Monroe’s psychiatrist diagnoses her as evidencing Cyclothymic Personality, a diagnosis which no longer exists but did when the story took place.

After using the DSM for basic research, a writer can then bolster his or her understanding of a disorder by using the countless books and journal articles available on each disorder, or even by perusing a standard college textbook on Abnormal Psychology.

**Recognize that Most Modern Psychotherapy Is not Freudian Psychoanalysis.** Writers have a tendency, when including psychotherapy in their stories, to include a couch, free association, dream analysis, endless discussions of childhood, and those ubiquitous Rorschach inblots. These are all facets of classic psychoanalysis which, while it still exists, is not currently practiced by many psychotherapists. There are over 350 distinct and definable systems of psychotherapy. I recommend that you avail yourself of Raymond Corsini’s excellent series *Current Psychotherapies*. Each edition of this work includes succinct but clear coverage on a number of psychotherapeutic approaches, including a brief statement of the underlying theory, the basic concepts of the system, its history, its current status, its applications and even a case example.

Resources such as these will not only strengthen the factual foundation of your fiction, but can also spark a legion of creative ideas.

**Caveat.** The DSM poses the same danger as does any other research resource:

It can inadvertently encourage a writer to create a caricature rather than a living, breathing human character. Therefore, I offer here some further insights on human functioning, with hopes that these simple ideas will help you to create characters in your horror fiction who not only display all the color and uniqueness you hope to invoke, but also the internal consistency that a reader expects from any fictional character.

**What is Personality?** Human personality is the characteristic and enduring way that each of us perceives and interprets the world; what beliefs and assumptions we make about ourselves, the world and other people; and the patterns of behavior were likely to show regularly. These patterns range from the smallest (the way a man plays with his mustache) to the most general (reacting with rage whenever one’s judgment is questioned.) In short, personality is the map we use in order to navigate our lives.

It is as if each of us wears a pair of colored eyeglasses with its unique hue. Everything we experience is filtered through those glasses and thus each of us has a uniquely individual take on the life we’re living and the world in which we live.

When someone has a personality disorder (distinct from a clinical syndrome or illness), he or she has a rigid, predictable and inflexible way of perceiving, interpreting and acting on the world. Thus, a Paranoid personality will interpret a comment, no matter how benign, as demeaning or threatening; an Avoidant personality will perceive remarks from others as indicating potential rejection or humiliation; a Schizoid personality will show little interest in relationships with others and will be unaffected by comments, good or bad. Because the inflexibility is so much a part of a personality disorder—indeed of most mental disorders—many clinicians, myself included, believe the word “disorder” to be a misnomer. If anything, most of the clients we see are too ordered, too predictable and limited in their perceptions and responses, and the goal of psychotherapy is to help them become less predictable.

Too often, unbalanced or psychotic characters in horror fiction deviate from this insight. Apparently the writer assumes that since he or she created a “crazy character,” that character can do virtually anything in the story, that the label of mental illness is a license to act totally unpredictably and irrationally. This is not true. Which leads me to my next point:

**Every Behavior Has a Goal.** When I was an intern psychologist, I was called in to see my first floridly psychotic patient. She was a pleasant and polite woman, but insisted that God was talking to her even as we conversed, and that she was afraid her husband would cause her to lose the child she was carrying, the result of God impregnating her. At first, being the wide-eyed intern, I made feeble attempts to somehow reel her in and encourage her to share the world I was inhabiting. Suddenly an insight struck me: If I had God talking in one of my ears, and a young psychologist in the other, who would I listen to? Having recognized that, I pro-
New NINC Committee Chairs

We are happy to announce that Kay Hooper has agreed to serve as Advocacy Chair in '99. She and her committee will look into issues of importance to us as writers, attempting to solve them as neatly as she did the sale of ARCs at Barnes & Noble! Past president Steve Womack takes on the Outreach Committee, attempting to cross-pollinate a bit with writers' organizations, and getting NINC's name out there in the world. Curtiss Ann Matlock continues as Internet Chair. She is also at work on a list of literary attorneys, with the intent to post the list on our Web site http://www.ninc.com. If you have the names of literary attorneys, please be sure to send them on to her. She's available online at curtissant@poboxes.com or CurtissAnn Matlock, RT. 2, Box 177A, Minco, OK 73059

Diet Coke Hits the Books

According to an article by Robert Dahlin in the Feb 1, 1999 Publishers Weekly, six major new titles are the focus of a unique marketing campaign. The books include River's End (Mar., Putnam) by [NINC member] Nora Roberts; and will be a spotlighted part of a multimillion-dollar merchandising campaign running from February 1 through April 30.

"Between 45 and 50 million 12- and 24-packs of Diet Coke and caffeine-free Diet Coke will contain an excerpt from one of these six titles. The design of each multi-pack pictures the featured book on every side and reproduces the covers of the six books in the promotion. That's more than eight million copies of each book's excerpt flooding virtually every retailer selling Diet Coke—and it's being done without financial commitments from the publishers involved."

To read more about this, check out the Feb. 1, 1999 issue of PW or go to PW online.

AAR Joins PW as BookExpo America Rights Center Sponsor.

Elsewhere in breaking news... this just in from the AAR...

MORE SIMPLY

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ceeded to immerse myself in her world and, to my surprise, found not that her behavior was horribly disorganized or random, but rather that every single behavior had a goal when one understood her world. For example, she walked backward with her hands on her stomach because God had told her he would strike her dead if she didn't protect their child. It all made sense.

You can understand, then, that you must know not only what your character's "symptoms" are, but how your character views the world from the inside. To truly captivate your reader, that world must be coherent and consistent, no matter how bizarre it may seem on its face.

**Everyone is Doing His or Her Best.** Upon first glance, this may sound ludicrous, but it's true. With the world they perceive the concepts they have of themselves, the goals they're pursuing and the options they see, people in general make the best choices they can at any moment. Remember this.

**Everyone is More than a Collection of Symptoms.** Although the DSM is a wonderful way to provide some structure to your aberrant characters, to give them a coherent and accurate form, it is crucial to understand that not one person is contained in any diagnostic description. The diagnostic system, like all systems, was created in order to simplify the world: therefore, the search was not for ultimate truth but for patterns, characteristics which tend to appear together. No one perfectly exemplifies any diagnostic pattern and no diagnostic pattern captures a human being. Not even close.

There is a philosophical concept know as the "A/Not A Absurdity," which states that when one draws a line between any two constructs—whether those constructs are mentally ill/mentally healthy, diabetic/non-diabetic, even dead/alive—and then one approaches that line from either direction...the line disappears. There is relatively little difference between people who are considered mentally ill and those who are not.

Psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan said it best: "We are all more simply human than otherwise."

And perhaps that's the secret of creating believable characters who portray any type of human aberration. It's not that they are radically different than the rest of us; it's that we share so much with them. We share their irrational fears, their unacceptable desires. We have our moments when we feel out of control, or when our ruthlessness rushes to the fore.

That is why the most effective characters in horror fiction who display some mental or personality disorder prove so chilling. After all, even cold-blooded killer Hannibal Lecter voiced the romantic notion that he and Clarice were looking up at the same stars. Even Norman Bates quietly mourned his mother.

We are all more simply human than otherwise.

"More Simply Human" originally appeared in Writing Horror, edited by Mort Castle (Writer's Digest Books, 1997) It has been updated and is here reprinted by permission of the author.

Tracy Knight is a clinical psychologist who lives and works in Carthage, Illinois. His short fiction in the horror, suspense, mystery and science fiction genres has appeared in numerous anthologies, including Werewolves, Wolves, Murder for Father, Whitley Strieber's Aliens, The UFO Files, and three of the books in the "Cat Crimes" series. He writes a regular column on Psychology and Crime Fiction for Mystery Scene magazine. He recently completed his first novel.

Elisa Shallcross is a former editor for Ballantine, Harlequin, and Silhouette, the author of a Regency, and a freelance cover copy writer.
the material, never more than two weeks. Because the preprinted cover flats are used to sell books to bookstores, cover copy is kept to a very strict schedule, and there's usually not more than a day or two of leeway in it.

If I receive a full manuscript, I sit down and start reading. I think it's an advantage that I come to a story cold, as a reader will. Unlike the author and the editor, I have no preconceptions about what the story should be, but see what is actually on the page. As a fiction writer myself, I get so mired in all the permutations and subtleties of my stories I have trouble writing a synopsis, let alone putting a hard sell in 100 or 200 punchy words. Even as an editor I found it difficult to write copy for books I acquired. I'd already worked with the book for so long that it was difficult to step back and see what made me want to read it in the first place.

When I'm sent a manuscript I've never seen before, though, I can feel a sense of discovery and excitement similar to that of a reader. There's nothing quite like the thrill of receiving a first novel by a talented new writer. I've been lucky enough to write cover copy for some really stand out first novels: Wings of the Storm by Susan Sizemore, Once Upon a Pirate by Nancy Block, and most recently, Touch Not the Cat by Tracey Fobes. When I'm in on the early stages of the "discovery," I try hard to pass along my excitement to the reader.

Sometimes, though, loving a book can be a problem. First of all, it puts a personal pressure on me to write copy that's worthy of the book. Second, if I get too involved in a book, I can lose that distancing that enables me to separate out the key elements and highlight them.

One of the toughest times I've ever had with cover copy was for Georgia Bockoven's The Beach House. It's an incredible, involving book. My standard operating procedure is to take manuscripts and go read them at one of two local coffeehouses. During the day, they're usually pretty quiet, and the staff is very nice, letting me sit for hours with a cooling cup of coffee. It gets me away from the phone, and for some reason, I seem to concentrate better there than I do in a quiet house. Anyway, I was sitting at a small table, plowing my way through a big pile of manuscript, and I reached the point where the old couple completes their suicide pact. I started bawling right there in the middle of this public coffeehouse. But, despite that involvement, or perhaps because of it, I had a tough time writing copy for The Beach House.

In fact, Harper made me rewrite my first piece and I feel as if I slaved over it. I have to say in my defense, though, that many companies don't like downers mentioned in copy, and death is usually a particularly negative buzzword. As for suicide...ohmigosh! I ended up describing their part of the story as "Maggie and Joe, married sixty-five years, courageously face a separation even their devotion cannot avert." I was pretty pleased with myself on that one. While I think most readers would guess the separation is probably death (especially after 65 years together), it put the emphasis on the devotion (which was the emphasis in the book, too).

This brings me to the subject of putting a positive spin on books with elements that are considered hard sells in the romance market. When an author writes about a non-commercial topic, it can really help to market the book if she adds a few commercial elements, as well. When I wrote copy for Bockoven's previous book to The Beach House, An Unspoken Promise, I felt like writing a note to the copy department, saying "Please note that I have not included prostitution, drug abuse, or the breakup of a marriage, all three of which occurred in the first chapter alone." Instead, I focused on sisterhood, family ties, and the heroine's search for her sister's birth mother—elements crucial to the book, but also highly commercial.

Returning to the actual process of writing cover copy, however... As I said, I usually take the manuscript and run off to the local coffeehouse. I sit with the manuscript and a scrap of paper to jot notes on. As I read, I record things that strike me, including random thoughts. I try to remember to write down both the hero and heroine's complete names with the correct spelling, because it can be surprisingly hard to find the last names later. After a while, my scribblings start to cohere into something that makes a full sentence, and if I'm lucky that sentence works as the first sentence of my first paragraph. Loosely, when I write romance copy, which makes up the bulk of what I do, I tend to use a format of one paragraph from the heroine's point-of-view and one paragraph from the hero's point-of-

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**Breaking News**

Association of Authors' Representatives Joins Publishers Weekly as BookExpo America Rights Center Sponsor.

Jean Naggar, President of AAR, notes: "The AAR is delighted by this opportunity to work together with the Rights Center at BookExpo America to promote a better understanding of the globalization of our industry and to identify the many challenges facing the international rights business at the start of a new century." As an organization representing the interests of literary agents across the country, the AAR's sponsorship of the Rights Center is expected to lend both sellers and buyers of rights more opportunity and access to a greater amount of content and rights networking at BEA this year.

"The sponsorship of the prestigious AAR, along with our increased domestic and international marketing efforts, allow us to deliver the highest level of domestic and international rights networking to all BEA participants," says Rita Uglianski, BEA's Director of Marketing and Industry Development. BEA's rights related sessions this year include:

- Licensing Law—Understanding the Ins and Outs; and [Editor's note, of particular interest to many NINC members] De-Mystifying Hollywood, wherein a panel of Hollywood insiders and industry professionals will provide insight into how Hollywood buys film, screenplay and television rights from book publishers, agents, and screen writers.

BookExpo America will be held at the Los Angeles Convention Center in Los Angeles, CA Friday, April 30 - Sunday, May 2 1999.

[Editor's note...so mark your calendars and get ready to fire away all the questions that aren't fit to print; we'll do our best to get the answers and a report post Expo. ;-) ]

**Trend Watch**

It's definitely a trend, with high-level editors leaving to become agents. The latest—former Doubleday executive editor Betsy Lerner has left...
BDD to become an agent at the Gernert Company. She'll be working for her old boss, David Gernert, who was editor-in-chief at Doubleday before founding his agency.

From the Left Coast

A group of 34 Academy-Award-winning screenwriters have banded together to demand a share of the profits on the films they work on, just like actors and directors have been getting for decades. Here's the really good news—Sony Corp. went for it! Each of the writers has agreed to work at least one film script for Sony within the next four years, at the same rate of pay as their last script, but with two per cent of the picture's gross—not net, but gross—receipts added on. This is a major step in the right direction for our LA brethren.

Publishers Add Imprints

Magazine and newspaper articles are suddenly very hot as film properties, bypassing the book stage completely, as producers look for hot info and ideas they see coming in faster media. But maybe a new St. Martin's effort will bridge the gap, going for pop culture with an LA beat. SMP has announced a joint endeavor with LA Weekly, a self-styled “alternative newspaper,” (www.laweekly.com) to create a new imprint for different kinds of books (nonfiction, fiction, hardcover, trade paper, whatever) to tell LA stories. They're planning to do eight to ten titles a year, with SMP executive editor Elizabeth Beier at the helm. Look for everything from cookbooks to the poppest pop culture.

After adding three new imprints in 1998, Avon Books have announced they'll add two more in '99. They're looking at a new brand called Tempest, intended for young readers, and a health-oriented imprint called WholeCare. Publishers Weekly reports that Hearst Book Group President William Wright looked for these new imprints to lessen “Avon's dependency on the romance field.”

One Week

Continued from page 7

view. I think that tends to give the most balanced view of the book, though that's not a hard and fast rule. Usually, I choose whose point-of-view to open in by going with the viewpoint of the sentence that comes to me first. Since I jot down stuff while I read, that's most likely going to be the main point-of-view of the opening of the book. Often, since romances are women-centered books, this will be the heroine's viewpoint. For instance, in Miranda Jarrett's novel Wishing, which is part of her "Fairbournes of Cape Cod" series, I opened up with the hero's point of view, just as she did: “When [Captain Samson Fairbourne of Cape Cod] writes a description of a perfect, obedient wife he says he wishes for, and heft it overboard in a bottle, all he has in mind is a bitter joke that will teach his young cousin a lesson on the foolishness of wishes.” I admit I don't remember if Pocket used that line exactly the way I wrote it, but it's a fairly accurate condensation of the opening chapter of that book.

Once I've got the opening sentence, I try to get down the central premise that drives the story and use that for the first paragraph. When I'm writing romance copy, that usually means I attempt to nail down the external conflict and perhaps give a hint of the internal conflict. Then, in the second paragraph, I usually switch points-of-view (heroine to hero, hero to heroine) and try to nail down the internal conflict.

When I've got most of the opening paragraph scribbled down, and perhaps some of the second, I pack up the manuscript and go home to my computer. I have a laptop, and I could take that paragraph scribbled down, and manuscript and go home to my computer. I have a laptop, and I could take that chunk of copy with me, but find I don't. The change of venue helps crystallize my thoughts, and since I usually walk, I find the 15-minute break, combined with some physical activity, helps me think. By the time I get home, my brain has usually been chugging along very nicely, and I charge into the house to try to get it all down on the computer. Often, I can get that second paragraph roughed in at that time.

Then I usually pack it in with the creative work on that piece of cover copy for the day. I'll type up other stuff—quotes and author bios and all the assorted bits that go into front sales—or go and do my grocery shopping. The next day I pull out a printout of the copy as it's written thus far and the manuscript. Then I settle down and alternate reading more manuscript and rereading the copy I have. If I haven't finished the second paragraph, I finish it then, and polish and fine-tune and sometimes completely rewrite what I have. I keep reading the manuscript until I have a piece of copy I'm satisfied with. For some books, that means the whole manuscript. With others, it might be as little as 100 pages. When I'm pretty sure I'm happy with the basic form of the copy, it's back to the computer for the next polishing. Then I print it out and leave it on the kitchen counter. Every time I walk by, I take another look through and make little changes.

Finally, the next day, I make any last tinkering changes, read it through for typos, and pack it up and send it to the publisher. I can—and have—done this whole process in one four- to six-hour stint, but I hate doing it that way. I like spending two to three days if I can, because the ideas solidify more easily that way. However, if I've got a lot of cover copy to do in a particular week, I can overlap. Once I've gotten the two main paragraphs down on the first piece of copy, I can go on to the manuscript of a second book while I tinker and fine-tune the first.

Then, of course, there's the matter of doing cover copy from less than a full manuscript. Partial of 200 pages or so are usually fine, but I hardly ever get those. The original 75 or so pages that an author may turn in at approval time quite often is enough, but can be misleading. I've run into some problems where I've written copy based on 75 to 100 pages, and when the author is sent the copy, she says, "Oops, well, umm, I've changed it a bit since then." Occasionally, I've been asked to rewrite with the author's addenda about the way the book is now.

Then there's writing from a synopsis, which can be hell on wheels. I prefer working from a manuscript, because all of the techniques I've described hardly ever work with a synopsis. I do best with a synopsis if I know an author's work well and can match her style from what I've read previously. I did copy for one of Linda Lael Miller's Springwater books from—I kid you not—one and a half pages of a concept sketch. I'm still slightly in awe of myself that I managed to pull such a feat. What helped there was that I know and admire Miller's writing, and that the Springwater series is
a tightly connected concept where all the books interlock. I'd had an entire manuscript on the first book, and this was the fifth piece of copy I'd written on the series in a period of about two months. A lot of the focus in that series is on the town of Springwater, so I could keep that focus as I wrote each piece of copy.

Where I run into trouble, though, is when I'm not familiar with an author, but the author has a strong enough relationship with her editor that she's leaving a lot of holes in the synopsis. The editor may know the author is going to focus on the romance in the actual book, but if the synopsis focuses entirely on the external action, I'm left to take wild guesses as to the conflict, which can be quite difficult. When I wrote copy for Somewhere Lies the Moon—a hardcover by Kathryn Lynn Davis that's a sequel to Too Deep for Tears and All We Hold Dear—I ended up skimming all of both books in order to make sense of the synopsis. That was 1,400 pages of reading books I wasn't even writing copy for. Hey, they were good books, and I didn't have to pay for my copies, but I'd have preferred to read them when I wasn't on deadline.

As well as writing the back copy, plus any front copy there is, I'm often asked to provide front sales material. For many books, that means picking a suitable excerpt from the book, usually between 100 and 200 words in length. Since it's hard to find a good scene that's only 200 words long, I tend to do a lot of cutting in order to get an excerpt down to that length, sometimes using material that was originally as much as 500 or 600 words. I cut paragraphs that aren't essential to the action, and jump ahead if there's anything repetitive, such as two kisses in one scene. Then I type out what I have and run a spell check to see how many words. And, then, I'm afraid to say I start trimming non-essential words one at a time until I get it to a reasonable length. I cut a lot of things like "He lowered his head," because the reader will be able to fill that in for herself.

In general, while I do often choose for romance copy a scene that turns into a first kiss, I focus on the dialogue in that scene, which I think tends to be more revealing of the tone of the book than the actual kisses. I try to end with a punchy line, either of dialogue or in the hero's or heroine's thoughts, that reveals something of the conflict, rather than just fading out with a kiss. That way (I hope!) I leave the reader with a desire to buy and read the book.

Once I've written the material to my satisfaction, I pack it all up and overnight it to the publisher. Publishing houses used to like freelancers who lived locally and were willing to come into the office to pick up and drop off material. With the advent of overnight mail and the electronic age, they seem more relaxed about this, though there are some holdouts. I live commuting distance from New York, and I can come in, but it's a sizeable chunk of change and three hours out my day if I do, so I tend to stick with houses who are willing to mail me material. Usually, I have to send back the material I work on, a printout of my copy cover, and the cover copy on a disk. Some copy departments like copy e-mailed to them, which is the fastest way, of course. You do tend to lose some formatting with e-mail, and cover copy is very format intensive. However, it's a huge step over the old days—less than ten years ago—when cover copy often ended being retyped in house.

For better or worse, my cover copy is usually viewed by the company as a jumping off point for the real copy. When I was an in-house editor at Harlequin and Silhouette, I figured that if I could regularly get three or four usable sentences out of freelance cover copy, then we should keep the freelancer. From the other side of the fence, I don't feel comfortable about the quality of my work unless I see at least 50 percent of what I wrote being used. If you ever see someone muttering and cursing, or doing high fives, in a bookstore while looking at a piece of copy on a book, that's probably me finding out how much of my copy made the cover. My goal is 100 percent, but I seldom see that. In-house the editor, the copy chief, and the author if she's managed to arrange to be part of the process, send material back and forth until everyone is satisfied. Usually the editor will do at least some of the rewriting, as will the copy chief, until dint of a collaborative effort they come up with the final copy.

In closing, I hope my commentary on cover copy serves to illuminate what may have been some gray areas in the murky publishing process. If any of you have specific questions, and have e-mail, I'd be happy to try and give you an answer. I'm at mas@castle.net.

I wish you all the very best with your covers, and hope to work on each and every one of yours some day. Wow, if that happened, I might actually get rich! ANK
The Royal(ty) Pain

(Reprinted by permission from the May 1998 issue of BULLETin, American Crime Writers League.)

So your royalty statement arrived this [spring]. After you got over your disappointment that the accompanying check was either nonexistent or smaller than you and your mortgage company had hoped, what did you do with that statement? Did you sit down with it and try to figure out exactly how many books you've sold and when? Or did your eyes immediately glaze over at all those incomprehensible numbers? Did you then stick it in a file drawer with all the others, thinking “Thank God I have an agent who's keeping up with all this”?

Well, maybe you do and maybe you don't.

Not all agents have an accountant's mindset and sometimes their eyes glaze over, too. It's our responsibility to choose competent agents, but it's also our responsibility to educate ourselves and to question whatever we don't understand in our royalty statements.

Take the matter of reserves. All publishers hold back money in case

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returns exceed sales. Does your statement tell you how much is being held in reserve? Does it tell you how many books have been returned? If not, you must ask your agent to ask the publisher for a “reconciliation to print.”

The publisher will then issue a document that tells how many copies of the book were actually printed, how many shipped, how many have come back and how much money they’re holding in reserve (i.e., not releasing your share of money they’ve already billed/received) in case more books come back from the dealers. Sometimes an agent will discover that the publisher is holding large reserves when the book’s already gone back to press three times! In such cases, s/he is often able to get the publisher to release most of those reserve royalties.

Right now, more than half the publishers do not list the amounts held in reserve. When one agent asked why, she was told that few agents ever inquire about it. If we all push our agents to ask for that reconciliation to print, publishers might start adding that information to our statements routinely since it’s more time-consuming and costly for them to go back and do individual print-outs on each book.

This chart was put together by the Royalty Committee of the

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This information comes courtesy of Laura Tucker of Richard Curtis Associates, Inc. and the Association of Authors’ Representatives. It was prepared by the AAR’s Royalty Committee (Vicky Bijur, Board Liaison; Jeff Gerecke, Committee Chair; Denise Marcil; Barbara Hogenson; Claudia Menza; and Deborah Schneider) and is current as of November 9, 1998.

The Association of Authors’ Representatives is a not-for-profit trade organization of literary and dramatic agents. It was formed in 1991 as a result of a merger between the Society of Authors’ Representatives (founded in 1928) and the Independent Literary Agents Association (founded in 1977).

Among its goals are to keep member agents informed about conditions in publishing, the theatre, motion picture and television industries, and related fields; to encourage cooperation among literary organizations; and to assist agents in defending their authors’ interests.
YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Feel as though you are swimming upstream? Feel as though change, downsizing, and new technology are about to do to you what Bill didn’t quite do to Monica? Think maybe you lived through the golden age and it’s all downhill from here?

Well, those feelings may be based in reality, but at least you aren’t alone. Consider, for a moment, what’s been going on in the record business.

The rock music business has always been rough and uncertain, but late last year, uncertainty shape-shifted into horror as Seagram’s Universal Music Group completed its acquisition of Polygram, a music giant which had been owned by Philips, the Dutch electronics conglomerate. (Universal acquiring Polygram? My goodness, that would be like Bertelsmann acquiring, say, Random House. Jeez, that’s big.)

With that deal, priced at $10.4 billion (that’s “b” as in “boy,” not “m” as in “mogul”), the music business began to fall in on itself.

Actually, the implosion had been going on for some time, but the structural implications of the change became manifest with the acquisition.

Seagram, the booze company, has become a major player in entertainment. It acquired Universal Studios last year, or was it the year before. Edgar Bronfman Jr., the scion of bootleggers, must not be much of a reader because he spun off the book arm of the Universal acquisition quickly. But he has been busily restructuring the Hollywood film business ever since.

Now it seems to be the record business’s turn in the barrel. Within a month of the purchase, A&M Records, which had been a major force in the music business since Herb Alpert first went to the bullfights in Tijuana, disappeared. Almost 200 employees were pink-slipped and given one day to clear out, sans Rolodexes, no doubt.

And at the same time, just down the street in Hollywood, Geffen Records fired 110 employees. That’s quite a bloodbath in a relatively small world, but the betting is that the firings were just the first of what will ultimately be thousands of lost jobs around the world.

Worse, or at least more painful from our point of view, was the beginning of a very nasty process by which an estimated 200 artists and bands will be, to coin a phrase, “out of the business,” or at least out of contractual connection to a major record label. (Does that sound familiar?)

The New York Times recorded the event in words that sounded way too familiar. Most of the 200 cancelled contracts involved artists “who thought that signing a record deal meant they were on their way to stardom,” reporter Neil Strauss wrote. “Soon they will find themselves right back where they started.”

Ouch.

He estimated that another 100 established acts, well-known musicians ranging from U2 and Elton John to Ice Cube and Amy Grant, will be shoveled, over the next few months, from the dead labels to new corporate stables. Their futures will be controlled, for better or worse, by executives, promotion people, and sales forces they have never met. (That’s like a writer suddenly finding him- or herself writing for a new editor at a publishing house they had never signed with. Sound familiar? Yeah, me too.)

On a smaller scale, the book publishing business has seen the same kind of implosion over the past five years, with much the same result.

I point out the parallels to music not only because I believe that misery loves company, but because a deeper look at the bloodbath on Sunset Boulevard suggests that technological change is at least partly responsible.

And at least in the music business, that same technological change is offering some new opportunities for the same artists who have been stung by downsizing.

Neil Strauss, the NYT pop music writer, suggested in a think piece a couple of days after the Seagram-Philips deal was concluded that downsizing was inevitable because the labels involved had become moribund. Herb Alpert’s trumpet doesn’t sell many compact discs; David Geffen, the creative genius who started Asylum Records, sold it, and then came back into the business a decade later to fire up Geffen Records, has moved on to Dreamworks, his collaboration with Steven Spielberg and Jeffrey Katzenberg, the former Disney movie guru.

The music business in the late 1990s is quite different from what it was in the ’60s, ’70s, and even the ’80s. For better and/or for worse, popular culture has been taken over by a few large corporations. Big-name entertainers have become bigger; idiosyncratic, innovative acts have found fewer and fewer venues in which to perform. Moderately talented musicians have lost their gigs and had to go back to selling real estate or flipping burgers. Hell, even some majorly talented acts have done that. If you don’t think so, tune into the “Where Are They Now” show on MTV. Nothing new under the sun there, friends. We’ve seen it happen in our own business, too.

But in his think piece, Strauss pointed out, quite rightly, that the creative outlets that were once available on the dead record labels have been replaced by a quiet revolution in technology called the Internet.

Music is now available in multimedia streams from your computer; an estimated 150,000 songs are now avail-
able for downloading via a format called MP3. The format is a compression system which allows fast transfer of CD-quality digital information onto your hard disk and, in the very near future, onto hand-held multimedia devices like the one called the Rio. The device, which is the size of a deck of cards, plays music that is stored on a "flashcard" which can store an entire song on a single microchip. (Sound like something called Rocket eBook? Sure does to me.)

Strauss points out that there are lots of problems to be thrashed out before MP3 becomes the standard of the music business. The biggest is copyright, which is always a problem in the digital domain since many of the songs available on the Net are bootlegs.

The corporate music companies have been fighting introduction of the Rio. Those companies want to be able to promote their artists and recordings on the Web but they know they can be ripped off by digital technology in the same way they thought they would be ripped off by home audio-taping on cassette decks.

(How long ago were double decks popular? Ten years? Maybe 15? I know that my wife still exercises to a homemade bootleg tape that includes everybody from Elton John and the Eagles to Hoyt Axton and Creedence Clearwater, but I don't think she's responsible for the death of A&M Records, honest.)

At the same time the recording industry is trying to kill the Rio, artists are using the new technology. Garage bands and lesser-known acts post their music for free, purely in hopes, I guess, that somebody may like it enough to want to pay for a different record someday in the future. The technology may not offer much hope of profit, at the moment, but the cost of moving an MP3 file over the Net is a fraction of a penny, so the exposure is great.

Strauss argues in his commentary that the big record companies, such as the one created by Seagram, may be fighting a rear-guard action against this alternative distribution channel for a long time.

Or, more likely, he suggests the giant corporations may usurp digital distribution by a variety of means. One Silicon Valley intellectual property firm is already preparing to offer the world MP4, which would allow digital downloads but would track royalty flow much like the Norwegians already are helping NINC by tracking reprographic rights. The system might even allow users to play a song for free for a few times before the file is erased, forcing the listener to go out and buy a permanent copy.

I started out this little rant with the idea of making a morality tale out of it. Maybe the only real moral to this story is that it isn't over. Structural change has killed many record companies, much as it has wiped both publishing houses and writers off the cultural landscape. But every loss is also an opportunity, or so it seems when the sun is shining and I've remembered to take my meds.

Which leads me to my next item....

THE COLD WAR IS OVER

At the risk of betraying my age, I will admit that I've spent several evenings this winter watching the CNN documen-
is in front of me. Soon it will be behind me.”

But Tom Wolfe is of a different mind. The author of A Man In Full, something of a literary icon himself, recently got into a cat fight with not one but two reviewers, Norman Mailer and John Updike. The results were amusing, if you enjoy verbal salvos.

The conflict probably dates back to the 1960s, when Wolfe, then noted as a journalist, whacked the New Yorker magazine, and Updike in particular, for failing to get out into the real world and report what they see.

Updike finally got even, I guess, by writing in the New Yorker last fall that Wolfe’s new novel, while displaying “grand ambition...still amounts to entertainment, not literature, even literature in a modest aspirant form.”

Now that may sound like a slam to lots of folks, and Updike clearly intended it as such. But the bitchiness reached a new level when Mailer weighed in with a review in the New York Review of Books.

“It is Tom Wolfe’s best book by far,” Mailer began. But....

The “but” came flowing like some verbal river from the fountainhead of New York literary archness. “At the highest level, it’s a failure—at a more modest plateau (which is to say, at the corrupt level), it is bound to prove a resounding success with its large popular merits.”

As a writer of popular fiction, I find both reviewers fundamentally foolish and because I kind of like the book in question, I found myself applauding Wolfe’s response:

“I think you have to take Mailer and Updike as a matched set, and ask why are those old bones rising up to try and shoot down this book. It’s because their own works of the past few years have been sinking without a bubble.”

It’s always fun to watch a cat fight, but the little literary flap reminded me of another review I read recently, this one of a television chef named Emeril Legasse.

Emeril crept into my consciousness last year when I surfed past the Food Channel one evening just as he was uttering one of his trademark phrases about “kicking it up a notch. BAAAAAMMM.”

Emeril is a faintly chubby, highly voluble Cajun-influenced chef who plays very well on television because he is more animated than John Madden and has better pots than the Frugal Gourmet. He has a very faithful following, dozens of whom crowd the set of his nightly show to watch him throw food around like Larry, Moe and Curly.

My wife says I would watch a dead cow rot, as long as it were on television, so I have watched Emeril a time or two. It was either that or the old Randolph Scott oater on the Western Channel. I found Emeril off-putting and amusing by turns, but nothing I witnessed prepared me for the review I ran across recently in the NY Times.

The skinning, disguised as a feature by Amanda Hess, spent two columns of newsprint, lots and lots of words, excoriating Emeril. Using typographic bullets like real ones, or at least trying to do so, Hess accused Emeril of “poor cooking skills,” “mangled tradition,” “a facade of accessibility,” and “sloppy presentation.”

“His roasted turkey calls for two sticks of butter (shoved through slits in the flesh of the bird.) I’m not sure anyone has lived to tell whether or not it’s good,” Hess wrote.

The whole review is like that. Emeril made the reviewer sick, figuratively if not literally. To Hess, Emeril was and is clearly an offense against good cooking, maybe against life itself.

I got to the end of Hess’ piece and was so struck by its vitriol that I had to go back and reread it entirely, trying to make sense out of it. Finally, I found the line that was the key to understanding what would otherwise have seemed an outsized response.

Buried in a paragraph in the middle of the review, Hess wrote that Emeril “dumbs recipes down so much that he removes all the intellectual effort that goes into creating subtle flavors in a dish.”

That, my friends, is how Hess views cooking, as an intellectual process intended to create subtlety. Now, I do a little cooking, and once in a while I can even get pretentious about it, but I never have to put too much intellectual effort into rubbing garlic on a porterhouse and flopping it over hot coals on the Weber as Ms. Hess obviously does.

That’s why she was so offended by Emeril. He’s an entertainer, a buffoon, a clown, a comic of comestibles. He’s on television; he has to be loud and blustery and sloppy, in just the same way Dr. Laura has to be curt and judgmental with her callers. That’s the shtick.

I do a lot of critiquing, criticizing, and otherwise cheap-shotting here, mostly as a means of venting my frustration with a very irritating business. But please, dear friends, always remember that what you read here is not gospel. It is merely one man’s opinion, an opinion that is colored by prejudice and filtered through kidneys of bias.

And remember this, as well, when some reviewer slanders your newest love project: They ain’t very smart, any of them. They are just human beings like the rest of us.

And they are being paid to do what they ought to do for free.

Now, next month, I promise to give you the skinny on the newest form of writer flagellation, reader groups. As my wife is fond of saying, there seems to be no limit to the human capacity for petty tyranny.

(You see why I keep her around, don’t you?)

— Evan Maxwell
ard to believe it's been almost three years. My first Online column appeared in these pages in July, 1996, little more than a recruiting piece for our then brand-new NINC listserv. Since then, I've reported on bulletin boards and newsgroups, Web sites for everything from research to promotion to advocacy, viruses, hoaxes, and cookies. I've ranted about copyright online and "netiquette," and my belief that knowledge is power and the Internet is our way to embrace that. I've passed on recommendations about everything from health concerns, to writing software, to music to write by, from discussions on NINCLINK (which has been through three different servers in as many years). At various times, I've talked about e-publishing, e-rights and e-readers, Acronyms, emoticons, spam—I've tried to explain them all. I've tried to walk you through the process of buying, building and maintaining your own Web site. Some of my columns have had themes, like how authors can make money on the Web, and some have just been collections of useful sites I discovered (or was told about) on the Internet.

And now, after almost three years, it's time to pass the torch—before I start repeating myself. Jan Nowasky, aka Lorraine Heath, has graciously (even eagerly!) offered to take over the monthly Online column—a fresh voice, with fresh ideas. I'll leave it to Jan to introduce herself next month, but I have reason to believe she has a lot more hands-on knowledge about the Internet than I ever did. (I did a pretty good job of faking it all this time though, right?) Anyway, I'll adhere to the old advice, "Always leave 'em wanting more"—and at least leave before anyone asks me to. <g>

To finish out my farewell column, I do have a few Web sites to share with you. www.builder.com/Servers/Hosting/?bb is CNET's page on Web hosting. Informative, with lots of links, it explains most of what you need to know about building a Web site and arranging to have it hosted. www.nciba.com/patholt.html is the place to go to subscribe (for free) to an irreverant and often biting newsletter about the bookselling and publishing industry, by bookseller columnist Pat Holt. Two medieval sites, one for research and Kristin Eckhardt (Kristin Gabriel), Campbell NE one for fun: http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/shuttle/eng-med.html is a Medieval research page with lots of links, including some to texts you can read online. And www.tower.org/insult/index/html is a random Elizabethan Curse Generator. Great for when you need just the right insult for a particular occasion! Oh, and while doing some of my own research, I've been comparing the results of several search engines. So far, GoTo.com and Altavista (both of which www.dogpile.com will search) seem to return the highest number of "hits" on a regular basis, especially when looking for something really obscure.

NINCLINK is still going strong, of course, and yes, I'll still be the e-mail administrator/content moderator there. Over the past month or so, we've had lively discussions on flawed heroines (just how flawed is too flawed?); comfort foods; the most reliable scanner, printer and computer brands; how writers' personalities affect the characters they write; self-promotion; historical attitudes vs modern readers; experiences in Africa; and the history of condoms (that was a fun one!) If you're still not subscribed (or have unsubscribed and want back on), just send an e-mail: To: LISTSERV@PEACH.EASE.LSOFT.COM Subject:Your-Ninc-Membership-Name (as it appears in the roster)

Body: SUBSCRIBE NINCLINK Your-First-Name Your-Last-Name

From now on, remember to send your online tips, Web sites and news to LorraineHe@aol.com And while you won't see me right here anymore, you'll still see me online!

— Brenda Hiatt Barber :)

INTRODUCING...

The following authors have applied for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

New Applicants
Kristin Eckhardt (Kristin Gabriel), Campbell NE
Joann Pence, Novato CA
Ginny Schweiss (Jenna McKnight), Wilwood MO

New Members
Shirlee Busbee, Covelo CA
Kay O. Cornelius, Huntsville AL
Sandra Madden (Sandra Coakley), Las Vegas NV
Eileen Putman [correction of misspelling]
NINC Members on the USA Today List

The Fast Track is a monthly report on Novelists, Inc. members on the USA Today top 150 bestseller list. (A letter “n” after the position indicates that the title is new on the list that week.) Members should send Marilyn Pappano a postcard alerting her to upcoming books, especially those in multi-author anthologies, which are often listed by last names only. Marilyn's phone number is 918-227-1608, fax 918-227-1601 or online: pappano@ionet.net. Internet surfers can find the list at: http://www.usatoday.com.

Members who write under pseudonyms should notify Marilyn at any of the above “addresses” to assure their listing in “Fast Track.”

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* et al.: written with other author(s) who aren’t members of Novelists, Inc.