

# Novelists' Ink Novelists' Ink Novelists' Ink

# Novelists' Ink

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

## *Publishing in the 21st Century*

BY RICHARD CURTIS

**L**ike a world held between the gravitational pulls of two stars, the publishing industry is suspended between two great paradigms. One is the familiar industrial model built around tangible objects: bound volumes of paper manufactured on printing presses, warehoused in depots, transported in vehicles and sold in stores; the other, newly born, can be described as virtual. The sun of traditional publishing and book selling has illuminated and warmed us for a millennium, but it is unquestionably fading, while the other, fueled by the prospect of direct communication between authors and readers independent of physical means of manufacture and distribution, scintillates with possibili-

ties. In the balance lies the fate of one of civilization's most precious artifacts, the book.

How is the transition from one system to the other affecting authorship today? What challenges can writers expect in the next few years? Is it possible to plot a course using coordinates that are not yet precisely fixed? In this series of articles I would like to describe the old and new models and speculate on how the roles of authors, editors, literary agents, booksellers, and even readers are changing—or must change—to adapt to evolving conditions.

### **A Dying World**

The best way to understand the differences between the two paradigms is to analyze the ways that traditional texts are distributed versus electronic versions. Looking unsentimentally at the publishing process, it is essentially one in which the writer's text is

delivered to the reader by means of a distribution medium. The process adds value to the work, converting a collection of words into a product for which money can be charged.

Printed books today are published and distributed through an industrial complex consisting of brick and mortar editorial offices, printing plants, warehouses, and retail stores. After being edited, the author's text is printed and bound. The physical object called the book is then transported from station to station in fossil fuel-powered vehicles. These peregrinations add cost to the original text and they are supposed to add value.

Whether they add value any longer has become debatable.

The distribution model of the book industry is a consignment one. Books are returnable to publishers for full credit, meaning transportation of books back through

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### 2005 Board of Directors

**PRESIDENT:** Vicki Lewis Thompson  
1536 W. Cool Dr.  
Tucson AZ 85704-2141  
(520) 297-9308  
VLTPENPWR@aol.com

**PRESIDENT-ELECT:** Brenda Hiatt Barber  
9241 Castle Knoll Blvd.  
Indianapolis IN 46250-3484  
(317) 849-3356  
brendahb@aol.com

**SECRETARY:** Linda Madl  
1734 King's Road  
Manhattan KS 66503  
(785) 770-9363  
linda@lindamadl.com

**TREASURER:** Deborah Gordon  
1240 Noonan Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95822-2507  
916-448-1964  
DBHGGORDON@aol.com

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR:** Annette Carney  
PO Box 33204  
Reno NV 89533  
(775) 746-1680  
annetecarney@sbcglobal.net

**ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE:**  
Barbara Keiler  
32 Atkinson Lane  
Sudbury MA 01776-1939  
Phone: (978) 443-0770  
Fax: (978) 443-0775  
b.keiler@juno.com

**CENTRAL COORDINATOR:** David L. Brooks  
Novelists, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1166  
Mission KS 66222-0166  
Fax: (913) 432-3132  
ninc@kc.rr.com

Website: <http://www.ninc.com>

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## President's Voice

# Born-Again PW Reader

Alert *Nink* readers might have noticed the boxed item in last month's issue announcing a Bargain Rate (!) on *Publisher's Weekly* for Ninc members. Those of you on deadline didn't notice diddly, but that's okay. Here it is again. Ninc members can now get *PW* for . . . (drum roll) \$149/year!

How many of you just plotzed? The less excitable types probably said to themselves *this is a discount?* The curmudgeons are still grumbling in the corner with comments like *oh, right, when hell freezes over, that's when yours truly will be paying that kind of highway robbery for a magazine.*

Yeah, well, it's a lot of moola. You could get about fifty iced lattes for that, and at least four tanks of gas. *PW* is expensive, even with your Ninc discount, and there's this other problem. It's a weekly, which means it comes . . . well, every week. Once you get behind, it piles up in a mound of guilt similar to unreconciled bank statements. Not that I'd know about that or anything.

Years ago I had a *PW* subscription and somewhere around the second month I lost control of the situation. Those suckers kept a-comin' and a-comin', sort of like Mickey with the buckets of water in *Fantasia*. When the subscription finally expired, I fell to my knees in gratitude.

Then last year I became a Board Member, and felt it was My Duty to subscribe again. My fingers trembled as I clicked the subscribe button on the *PW* site. I could see all those weekly issues massed at the border, ready to invade my house. And this time I would *really* have to read them, because I was in an Official Position.

Well, ladies and gents, I am proud to say I'm a born-again *PW* reader. I have seen the light, discovered the secret, slain the beast. Here's the key. First of all, forget the cost. It's tax deductible and it's worth every penny. We're in the book business. This is a magazine devoted exclusively to that subject. 'Nuff said.

Second of all, and this is the real secret, *you don't have to read the whole thing.* I'm sure that was my main problem my first go-round. I'm a read-the-whole-thing kind of person, especially when I paid \$149 smackers for it. Forget that. Read what catches your eye. It will be enough to justify all that money.

Recently I found an article that justifies the entire subscription for me. Andrew Grabois, a former director of publisher relations at R.R. Bowker, said that the book business is not dying! Not only that, he backed up this amazing claim with stats! When someone makes an outrageous statement like that, he has to have stats, because we all know that movies, TV, video games, and Texas Hold 'Em tournaments are swallowing every available minute of leisure time. We all know that books are doomed. Right?

Not according to my boy Andy. In the 1920s, *PW* estimated that only about five million people bought a book that wasn't a Bible. Last year the Association of American Publishers estimated book publishing revenues at \$23.7 billion. And guess what? According to the stats collected by Mr. Grabois, that's 152 percent more than the total box-office

gross for all movies in theatrical release. It's even 39 percent more than the entire video and portable gaming industry.

Here's Andy, in his own uplifting words. "As we nurse a collective inferiority complex, we are missing a great historical shift: In a little less than a generation, U.S. book publishing has become the most prolific producer of 'content' in the world, and, more importantly, history's greatest enabler of reading."

If that doesn't put a skip in your step, nothing will. Andrew Grabois is my new hero, and I found him in the pages of *PW*. What a bargain!

*Dutifully yours,  
Vicki*

The Ninc Board has voted to give three scholarships to the Recapture the Magic Conference in New Orleans March 30-April 1, 2006. The scholarships will use revenue from the Linda Kay West Fund and will cover only the conference fee; all other expenses are the responsibility of the recipient.

The scholarships, which honor Linda Kay West and Cheryl Anne Porter, are designed to give a boost to those who would otherwise be unable to afford the conference. You may apply yourself or nominate a deserving fellow member. If more than three applications are received, the names will be drawn from a hat. To apply, email Vicki Lewis Thompson at [vltpenpwr@aol.com](mailto:vltpenpwr@aol.com).

**DEADLINE, SEPTEMBER 25, 2005**

### **Stay in Touch with Ninc online.**

Visit the website at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com). Join the neverending e-conversation—for members only—by joining Ninclink. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at [BrendaHB@aol.com](mailto:BrendaHB@aol.com)

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

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

#### **New Applicants:**

Adele Budnick (*Adele Ashworth*),  
Flower Mound TX  
Patti Olszowka (*Patti O'Shea*),  
Minnetonka MN

Leslie Wheeler, Cambridge MA  
Sherrilyn Kenyon (*Kinley MacGregor*)  
Spring Hill TN  
Lenora Nazworth (*Lenora Worth*)  
Shreveport LA

#### **New Members:**

Sandy Blair, Plano TX  
Sherry Crane, Carmel IN  
Carol Culver (Carol Grace),  
Woodside CA  
Stephanie Feagan, Midland TX  
Diane Noble, Palm Desert CA  
Kate Rothwell (Summer Devon),

West Hartford CT  
Shari Shattuck, Tujunga CA  
Katia Spiegelman (Kate Pepper),  
Brooklyn NY  
Carol Wagner (Marisa Carroll),  
Deshler OH

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

# Publishing in the 21st Century

Continued from page 1



the chain of brick and mortar stations from whence they came. This practice was originally created as an admirable incentive for booksellers to take chances on new writers. Most other manufacturing processes place the burden of disposing of unsold goods on the retailer, such as in-store sales at increasingly high discounts. Not so for publishers.

For most of the twentieth century a modest and stable rate of return stimulated the book industry's growth. In the 1980s and '90s, however, the return rate for trade books (fiction and nonfiction of general interest) began to soar to unprecedented levels of fifty percent and even higher. One does not need an advanced degree in business to perceive that it is almost impossible to make a profit selling one unit of a product for every two manufactured, especially when the manufacturer is compelled to fully refund the purchase price to the customer. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a less efficient delivery system.

As cash grew shorter and shorter, publishers developed strategies to raise more of it. One was to pursue branded authors who could guarantee profits. This strategy seemed sensible in theory but failed in practice as shrewd agents demanded and got huge prices for their household-name clients, guaranteeing only that that many authors would get rich while their publishers lost money or at best broke even.

Other publishers sought mergers with larger houses or rich conglomerates in the hope of becoming

major players in the bidding for those household-name authors. Like many a chemical reaction, this approach generated much light and heat, but as time went by the new entity found itself hobbled by the same cash flow problems that had triggered the merger, only on a larger scale. This insatiable hunger for capital led to a new round of acquisitions, and this time not of marginal presses but of giants like Simon & Schuster, Doubleday, Macmillan, Putnam, Warner, Harper, and St. Martins.

In the process, the unique personality and culture of each company that succumbed were destroyed. Those executives fortunate enough to survive the acquisition found themselves in a surreal corporate culture that seemed to have little to do with the values that got them there. Editors became disenfranchised as they lost touch with the wonderful and mysterious process by which art and literature are created. Many left the industry, to be replaced by editors whose mandate was to acquire books and authors that would guarantee high sales. This emerging culture can be characterized by what was aptly described as a blockbuster mentality. It has become the prevailing one in today's book business.

Authors, too, became disenfranchised as they confronted a world that rewarded bestsellers prodigiously while giving short shrift to newcomers and modest performers. Publishers could no longer afford to carry promising new writers until they justified the investment with a breakout book. Authors were now expected to hit the ground running with perfectly crafted, highly commercial hits.

An agent I know, asked by a brilliant but penniless author how he was supposed to support himself until he completed his breakout opus, advised him, "Drive a goddam taxi."

Had the plethora of mergers and acquisitions that shrank the number of publishers to a handful of behemoths achieved a literary renaissance, perhaps we could rationalize that it was worth all the turmoil. But it did not. After each consolidation the patient continued to hemorrhage. It became obvious that gigantic publishers hemorrhage the same way that tiny ones do; it's just that gigantic publishers have more blood to lose and the losses can be disguised in the financial reports of their parent companies.

Like many a dying patient, publishers have lived in denial about the underlying cause of their chronic losses. Yet, the reason has been in plain sight all along: *the returnability of books is killing the business.*

## A New Form of Currency

Fear of provoking Federal antitrust prosecution inhibited publishers from combining to combat the practice of returnability, even though it was draining the vitality of the industry. What was worse, the vested interests of the retail bookstore business insured that the system would never change. Powerful chain store entrepreneurs shrewdly recognized that *returns are a form of currency* and found a way to systematically manipulate them. Instead of paying cash for new titles, the chains simply returned slow-moving stock and applied the credit toward the

purchase. No money changed hands—just paper.

Deprived of capital, publishers developed their own way of manipulating the currency of returns. They achieved this by withholding royalties from authors. They figured out that they could defray their overhead by holding author money for long periods of time in order to offset possible returns. The higher the percentage of royalties “reserved” against returns and the longer those reserves were held, the more interest publishers could earn.

The returnability of books was originally created as a good will gesture. Since then, the currency of returns has been debased, pitting booksellers against publishers and publishers against authors in an atmosphere of distrust and anger. In short, the old system has become corrupt and dishonest.

### **The New World**

Towards the end of the twentieth century, advances in computer technology and telecommunication offered thrilling vistas of a new way to produce and deliver texts to reading audiences. The maturation of digital word processing, email correspondence, Internet commerce, cell phone communication, and miniaturization of computers provided a climate in which development of e-books could go forward vigorously. A generation comfortable with computers and Internet navigation had evolved for which the idea of electronic books seemed like a natural step. The meteoric ascent of amazon.com provided an attractive business model for online bookstores.

Although development of a viable handheld e-book reader proved more challenging than visionaries had projected, the eventual perfection of such a device

and its adoption by the mass market was taken for granted by most futurists. Their optimism was bolstered by growing investment in research and development fueled by the economic boom of the 1990s. Towards the end of that decade these streams converged, and if any year could be celebrated as the official start of the digital book era, it is 1998.

In that year, breakthroughs in two initiatives were announced.

### **E-Books**

The first introduced to the public a prototype of the portable electronic reader, the Rocket Book. Though crude (it would eventually be succeeded by far better devices and delivery systems) the mere thrill of downloading a text from a remote server and “navigating” it on an “e-book” had a galvanizing effect on authors and publishers alike. When, not long afterwards, bestselling author Stephen King self-published a novella and offered it for sale on the Internet, any publisher still in denial about the potential of e-books as an alternative publishing model woke up with a start.

Though initial giddiness about an e-book revolution was to prove premature as technological problems and business realities plagued progress, the impression nevertheless was indelibly imprinted on the consciousness of anyone connected to writing and publishing: a day would come when books would be read on a palm-sized reader.

Until that day, the reading device of choice was still the traditional book, and with all its faults there was still money to be made in publication of the good old bound and printed version--if only a more efficient way could be developed to distribute it. Enter the

second technological marvel, the process called print on demand.

### **Print on Demand**

Until the introduction of “POD” in 1998, the basic process for printing books had not varied from the model that prevailed for many centuries. Speculating on customer demand for a book, publishers printed a certain number of copies, distributed them through booksellers, and warehoused the unsold stock until the time came to replenish bookseller supply through another printing. As the book trade developed in the twentieth century, profits on sales were augmented by revenues generated by the licensing of subsidiary rights such as book clubs, reprint editions, and translations.

Though book marketing has never been particularly efficient, post-World War II publishing seemed to flourish and promised to continue flourishing as long as returns were held to modest levels. But returns grew like a cancer. The cure? Print on demand.

How does POD work? Computer-readable files of a book’s text, cover, and illustrations, if any, are stored on the printing company’s server in such formats as Quark or PDF. Unlike traditional books requiring print runs of thousands of copies and storage in warehouses, POD is capable of printing a few copies or even a single one for specific customers.

In a POD transaction, a customer orders a copy from an online retailer like amazon.com, charging the purchase to a credit card. The book is then printed and drop-shipped to the customer. The sale is final; unless the book is damaged it is not returnable. Though the cost of printing one copy is higher (as of this writing as much as four times higher) than that of a single unit of a

# Publishing in the 21st Century

▶ conventional print run, there is no waste whatsoever; the “sellthrough” percentage—the ratio of books actually sold to books shipped—is 100%.

But it was not just the efficiency that inspired almost hysterical hyperbole among publishers who had seen POD in action at the publishing industry’s annual book expo in 1998. It was the realization that the process enabled them, *entitled* them, to keep books in print in perpetuity. No longer would publishers have to return to authors the rights to their books on the grounds that it was too costly to issue and warehouse new printings.

## Author? What’s an Author?

The technological breakthroughs of e-books and print on demand stunned the publishing

community. It was as if the magnetic poles had shifted leaving everyone connected with books utterly disoriented as a new millennium dawned. Suddenly we were confronted by perplexing questions and paradoxes: In the coming age of disintermediation—of direct delivery of texts from author to reader—exactly what function will publishers serve? Will editors have anything to edit? Will bookstores and libraries be necessary? How will readers know what to read? Will agents be relevant? Most disturbing of all, as technology empowers authors to perform all the roles traditionally undertaken by publishers—printing, distribution, and publicity—will they still be able to define themselves as authors?

Many of these questions will be resolved as we progress towards a virtual future. But be-

cause we are still controlled by the gravitational pull of traditional publishing, there are far more urgent issues at hand. Can authors succeed in an environment that punishes modest sales performance? How do editors balance their need to nurture literary endeavor against the intense pressure to acquire blockbusters? What strategies are agents employing to introduce new talent into a contracting marketplace?

In the next installment of this series we’ll explore the current ecology of publishing in the twenty-first century.

*Note: this article has been reprinted with the permission of literary agent, Richard Curtis. It originally appeared on the website, Backspace.com.*

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Da Vinci Code Passes First Count Case

Lewis Perdue’s case against Dan Brown, Random House, and others was dropped by a NY district court judge. After reading the books, the judge stated, “A reasonable average lay observer would not conclude that *The Da Vinci Code* is substantially similar to *Daughter of God*.” Although *The Da Vinci Legacy* was part of the suit, it wasn’t considered as significant. There are conflicting reports on whether Perdue plans to appeal the decision.

### New Agency to Take a New Approach

Former colleagues from HarperCollins, Cathy Hemming and Stephen Hanselman, have founded what they are calling an author services agency. *LevelFiveMedia* will take up residence on 42<sup>nd</sup> St., providing not only literary representation, but also media development and marketing consulting. They also plan to limit their project to working intensively with clients, with an unofficial motto “fewer authors, more services.” No one has mentioned any clients’ names.

### Finalist in Quill Awards announced <http://www.quillsliteracy.org/index.html>

General fiction includes: Nick Hornby’s *A Long Way Down*, and Sue Monk’s *The Mermaid Chair*. Mystery/Suspense/Thriller has Janet Evanovich’s *Eleven on Top*, and Elizabeth Kostova’s much-talked-about *The Historian*. Romance has two Nora Roberts titles, another Janet Evanovich book, Debbie Macomber, and newcomer MaryJanice Davidson. Science Fiction/Fantasy/Horror lists Stephen King and Terry Pratchett. A full list of nominees is at the Quill web site. Voting for the general public is from August 15 to September 15. An edited one-hour version of the awards ceremony will be televised on NBC in October.

*“Bits” compiled by Sally Hawkes*

## *First Draft in 30 Days* by Karen S. Wiesner

REVIEW BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

*First Draft* is subtitled, “A novel writer’s system for building a complete and cohesive manuscript.” The first time I saw it, my brain read, “a novel writer’s system for building a complete and *obsessive* manuscript.”

For those who are NOP’s (non-outline people), this book would definitely seem obsessive. The author lays out a schedule for every aspect of story development, from characters and their settings to major plot points. However, she makes a good case for her recommendations when she says, “Once you become a published author, the pressure is on at all times. It never lets up because you’re expected to get better each time. . . That’s why it’s absolutely essential to become a productive writer as soon as you can. . . .”

I’m sure there are many reading this review who don’t need help being productive. For the rest of us, however, there’s a wealth of information here.

“I firmly believe that creative writing is 75 percent brewing, 25 percent actual writing,” Wiesner says. Accordingly, she opens the book with a list of 26 suggestions for brainstorming productively.

The next four chapters discuss the first 24 days of the 30-day system, which include characterization, interviewing and research, crafting opening scenes, strengthening the middle of the story, and creating satisfying endings.

Chapters six and seven talk about strengthening the outline you’ve created. For me, these two chapters were worth the price of the book. Whether a person habitually uses something for outlining or not, these two chapters give numerous useful suggestions for finding plot holes and fraying subplot threads before your editor does. The beauty of Wiesner’s 30-day system is that the writer finds these problems when the book is still in outline form (around 25 pages) rather than two-thirds of the way through a manuscript.

Chapter eight gives suggestions for applying the

30-day system to a partially written novel and re-outlining a stalled project. Chapter nine then shows how to use the outline to create the finished book.

Wiesner goes beyond the single book, though. Her final chapter talks about career planning, and how the 30 day system can enable a writer to create achievable goals both for the coming year, and for five years hence.

The appendices then give examples of the schedules, worksheets and goal sheets used in the system.

This book is not about creating formulaic stories. To me, the system seems to be more of an aid for focusing my creative energy, so my “brewing time” doesn’t become fixated on trivia or consumed by ultimately unusable ideas. I especially appreciated the tips for evaluating any story—regardless of the method used in its creation—to make it stronger and more compelling.

Though *First Draft in 30 Days* appears lengthy at first, a full quarter of it is devoted to the worksheets and schedules in the appendices. Throughout the text, Wiesner illustrates her methods using familiar and popular books. Thus, it was a fairly quick read. The system is also straightforward enough that I can put it to use without having to re-read each chapter just to figure out what I’m supposed to do.

Whether an author buys this book to learn how to increase her productivity or just to take advantage of the chapters on strengthening your story, there is likely a useful tip within these pages for any writer.

*Janelle Clare Schneider has spent the past 15 years trying to figure out how to become a productive writer while also filling her various other roles. Stay tuned for more detail on whether this system actually works for her.*



March 30—April 1, 2006  
Hotel Monteleone  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Keynote Speaker:  
*Nora Roberts*

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**Writing from the White Hot Center ~ Robert Olen Butler**

Robert Olen Butler, working writer and author of *From Where You Dream*, will work with us on creating stories that resonate in our bones, dreamstorming, moments that manifest the deepest yearning of your characters, organic structure, moment-to-moment sensual experience, the cinema of the mind...

**Optional Pre-Conference Workshop—March 30**  
**8:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m.—\$65 fee includes luncheon**

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The Conference starts with registration at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 30 followed by a buffet supper, the annual meeting, Ninc at Night sessions and, of course, the dessert buffet.

Friday begins with a full breakfast buffet and members-only sessions until 3:30. (Evan Maxwell will be reprising his long awaited update on East of the Hudson.) Editors & agents will join us Friday evening for our Welcome Reception.

Saturday starts with a full breakfast buffet followed by business panel sessions. We will wind up at 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 1 following a luncheon with the keynote address by Nora Roberts. Please join us as we brainstorm how to Recapture the Magic of writing and publishing.

Early Bird Registration for members is \$295 until Sept. 25. Register online at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com) or use the form in the August *NINK*.

We encourage you to register early. Deluxe Rooms are \$179/night. Junior suites at \$375/night. However, once our room block is filled, the Monteleone is under no obligation to offer these rates. These rates are not available through travel agents. A Group Number will be provided to you by email or regular mail with confirmation of your conference registration and verification of payment. Once you have registered and received the Group Number, contact the Hotel Monteleone at Phone: 504-523-3341, or Toll-Free: 800-535-9595, to make your reservations. (<http://hotelmonteleone.com>)

For more information, contact Susan Gable at: [sgable@susangable.com](mailto:sgable@susangable.com). Or write to: Susan Gable, PO Box 9313, Erie PA 16505

— *Pat Hamon, New Orleans  
Conference Coordinator*

# Duo-logue

## “It’s Just Business...”

**Pat:** Haven’t we all been on the receiving end of that phrase during our careers? And haven’t we all wanted to make Voodoo dolls of whoever delivered the phrase and stick pins in its most vulnerable parts? (See? Another reason to go to the Ninc conference next March in New Orleans—stock up on Voodoo dolls.) I’ve asked Julie Elizabeth Leto to duo-logue on this topic because she strikes me as a hard-headed business person with steely-eyed resolve.

True, Julie?

**Julie:** Hard-headed? Definitely. Steely-eyed resolve? Yeah, sometimes. I wish I could say I’m really a wimp in “steely-eyed resolve’s” clothing, but I can’t. I say “I wish” because wimping out is easier. No conflict! No risk! No one thinks I’m a b\*tch! But I believe in myself as a writer and as a businesswoman and I know that despite having several fabulous editors and an agent I love, no one is really as invested in my career as I am. I refuse to be spoken down to or placated. But make no mistake, I sometimes hate the businesswoman role. I’d much rather sit in my room and write my books and have everyone love them and publishers push them and readers buy them in droves without me having to do more than write, write, write. But alas, that isn’t how this business works.

**Pat:** But some authors say that is how the business works. That if you write your books and they’re good, everything else will take care of itself. What do you say to those authors?

**Julie:** I say that the industry has changed. The big guns, the writers on the bestseller lists, are for the most part, smart businesspeople. From Tom Clancy to James Patterson to Janet Evanovich. I use them as my models. There are too

many excellent books that no one reads because they are not marketed strongly enough—books that don’t get publisher support.

And you know what they say, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” Of course, that squeaky wheel has to back up their squeaking with good books, but in my mind, good books are fairly easy to come by. I know tons of truly talented authors. If you want publisher support, you have to make that known. You have to give them something to market—and that includes you, not just the book.

**Pat:** I consider myself only a semi-hardheaded businesswoman, a sort of hybrid, for reasons we’ll get to later. In the meantime, I’m fascinated that you wish you could wimp out, because I empathize. For me, it’s seeing a situation developing ahead, and knowing that my immediate future would be much smoother if I could only close my eyes to this thing coming toward me ...and all the while there’s a fatalistic recognition that my eyes—along with my mouth—will refuse to close.

You mentioned taking the risk, facing the conflict, being viewed as a b\*tch—that can be a danger, can’t it? I believe it has crimped my career in some past circumstances. At times I received feedback that questioning (even with reason and logic <g>) was not what was expected or desired. I also was compared unfavorably with authors who wouldn’t fall into the hardheaded businessperson category, who didn’t rock the boat.

It’s human nature to prefer a smooth ride, so I can understand a preference for non-boat-rockers—it makes perfect sense. And with reading being so subjective, can that be ruled out as influencing decisions, at least to some (subconscious) degree?

What do you feel being a hardheaded businesswoman has gained you? Do you think it’s ever hurt you?

**Julie:** No, I don’t think it’s ever hurt me, at ▶

# Duo-logue

## “It’s Just Business...”

least, not in ways I can identify. See, for me, it’s this—I can’t live with myself and I can’t work creatively if I believe that someone has wiped their feet on me. If I’m not “feeling the love,” I feel like I’m spinning my wheels. And by “love,” I really mean respect and due consideration as a professional writer.

But I’m not necessarily a “hard-headed” businesswoman when I’m dealing with publishers. I’m just a businesswoman. End of story. The hard-headed part is only unleashed on my good writing friends. I leave the bull-headed bitch at the door when I talk to my publishers. I’m respectful, but firm. I listen. I express understanding when I can and I make rational arguments, if needed. But I can tell you that I’ve been known to be a little more than firm when I feel the situation warrants and so far, no one has blackballed me.

I try to let people get to know me. It’s easier to be honest and forthright in business when you have proved you are honest and forthright in all aspects of your life. No one is surprised!

I acknowledge that publishers probably aren’t used to dealing with authors like me. I’ll often pepper my interactions with, “Look, I know you don’t want to hear this from me...” or “I understand you’d prefer I just keep my mouth shut,” and then give the big BUT and go on. I’m sensitive to the editor’s discomfort with discussing some topics with me, but I can’t let it change how I operate. I make sure the publisher understands that I’m not coming at whatever we’re talking about from a personal perspective, but from a professional one. I’m a team player. I express in many ways that I expect the publisher and the author to work together to make us BOTH successful. When they truly accept that I’m simply an author who does not hand off all decision-making and blindly follow, we get along fine. I think in many cases, what I’ve gained is the respect of my publishers, even if I am more difficult to deal with than others. And I make it up to them by writing good books and

selling well—sort of putting my money where my mouth is.

And by the way, I’ve never been afraid of being called a bitch. It’s a badge of honor, in my mind. Babe In Total Control of Herself. I’ve learned that even if you’re reasonable and level-headed, if you are strong and female, someone somewhere will call you a bitch. Whatever. It’s their problem, not mine.

**Pat:** Other than staying sane, though, has it benefited you? Okay, staying sane is a big benefit, but I’m thinking in terms of concrete benefits. Clauses, money, contracts—the stuff of which hard-headed businesspeople dream <g>.

**Julie:** Yes, I think so. I’ve had clauses changed in contracts pre-agent that other authors never thought to ask about. I’ve gotten the promotion and exposure from extra projects because I went to the publisher with ideas. I never expect them to hand me anything; I work for it! I can think of one incident when I got a three-book contract (pre-agent) because I simply made it clear I expected this to make up for a bad situation. I pretty much asked what they were going to do to make it up to me. Now, remember, I said all this in a very professional, calm, and business-like way. I also had an editor who supported me (the screw-up in question was not her fault). But I was resolute and luckily for me, the timing was right.

I also believe that some of the special projects I’ve been invited to participate in have come as a result of my editor and her bosses knowing that I’m as invested in selling books as they are. At least, that’s what I like to think. And since I still have a healthy, growing career, acting in my own best interests hasn’t hurt me.

Look, the bottom line is this—we’ve all seen real, true divas who throw tantrums and make public spectacles and yet, they remain published and published well because they sell books and make money for their publishers. So what harm

could there possibly be in being a reasonable, professional, but firm and proactive author? I try to never ask for anything that's unreasonable ...and you have to educate yourself to know what is reasonable and what is not!

**Pat:** Ah-hah! But how do you go about educating yourself about what's reasonable and what's not?

And what about when you are convinced you are being a reasonable, professional, but firm and proactive author, but another party in our three-headed primary relationship (author, agent, editor) does not agree? First, how do you gauge if that's happening? Second, do you reassess your stance? Ever decide the non-believer is right? And third, if you still believe you're being a reasonable, professional, but firm and proactive author, how do you handle the other parties' (clearly misguided) disbelief?

**Julie:** Educating yourself first and foremost means participating in your career. Talk to other writers. Talk to other agents. See who is getting what and why and how. (That doesn't mean calling your editor and whining that "so-and-so got this and you want it, too!" I could do a whole article myself on why this is professional jealousy at its ugliest!) Know people. You can't live in a cave in this business and expect to get all your information handed to you on a silver platter at the one conference you attend every year. You've got to work for it, build relationships and friendships and trust. Watch the lists. Watch trends. Go to bookstores and see what is being bought. Talk to readers. It's not that hard.

As for if one of the three-party team doesn't believe ...it depends. If it's the agent, fire them. They work for you and they need to share your vision. If they don't, get one that does. If it's your editor, listen. If you feel that maybe your editor has a point, then reassess. If you feel your editor is holding you back, get a new editor. It's not impossible and it will not necessarily ruin your career. That said, I have been fortunate enough to have editors who keep my delusions of grandeur in check. I definitely listen, even if I don't always agree. Being confident does not mean thinking you're right all the time. I'm confident enough to listen to other people and think about what they are telling me, and then make my own choice. I also surround myself with friends who will do the same thing for me — writing friends who are surfing the same rough waves. They're priceless. And they know my personality, so they'll play devil's advocate with me until I'm sure I'm making the right choices.

But I do follow my gut—and sometimes, that does mean ignoring everyone else's opinion. It's scary, but what about this business isn't?

**Pat:** That's easy. No part of this business isn't scary. Except maybe the Ninc-at-Night chocolate buffet.

Pat and Julie have lots more to say. (Surely you're not surprised at that with these two!) So they'll be back with the 2nd half of their Duo-Logue in a later *NINK*.

USA TODAY bestselling author Julie Elizabeth Leto sold her first book in 1998 and has since sold over 20 projects to three publishers. In her new series for Simon & Schuster (starting with *Dirty Little Secrets*, 6/05) starring kick-ass Latina heroine Marisela Morales, Julie is able to channel all her hard-headed, tough-girl tendencies without getting into any trouble. Sort of.

Pat McLaughlin, writing as Patricia McLinn, whose head is bruised and battered but unbowed from hitting it against brick walls, has a December release from Ninc-member Fran Baker's Delphi Books. *The Games* tells the interconnected stories of three women during the Winter Olympics — sixteen days that can make careers, break hearts, and change lives.

## Bits'n'Pieces

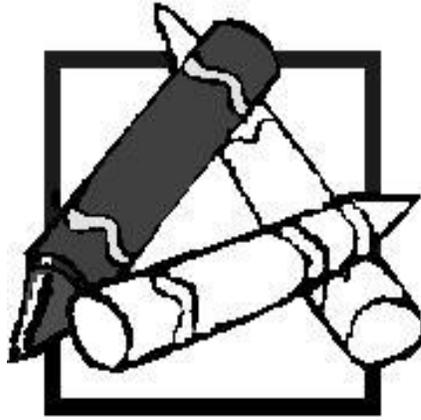
### Knopf Goes Ahead with Cleave's *Incendiary*

Chris Cleave's novel, *Incendiary*, about terrorism in London had a lay down date of July 7 in the UK. Cleave made some tough decisions to down play the scheduled publicity. Random UK removed ads for the London Underground. In the US, however, Knopf sent out emails the following week with the heading—"Aftermath of Terror / When Fiction and Reality Intersect," the body of the text began with "Given the times we are living in there is no novel more undeniably relevant or gut wrenching than Chris Cleave's debut novel *Incendiary*."

### Amazon Breaks for Harry

*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* brought 1.5 million advance orders, but Amazon claims to have only broken even because of deep discounting and other incentives. The company did ship to 165 countries.

**Crayon  
on my**



**Key  
board**

## ***Creativity: Can you overdo it?***

**BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER**

When I began my writing career, I had a mentor who had always wanted to be a writer. He is a successful businessman, but something in him still longs to write fiction. He supported me in countless ways as I worked toward *The First Sale*. Whatever my writing career becomes will be due, in certain ways, to the seeds of “you can do it” he planted and nurtured in me.

He also fostered in me a sense of dedication to my craft. I had a 40-hour-a-week job which paid my bills. Any time not taken up by my job, my mentor felt, should be spent at my computer, pounding out the next scene, chapter, or story. When I spoke of going for coffee with a friend, or my interest in a flower arranging class, I heard some variation of, “You shouldn’t waste your energy on anything that doesn’t pay your bills or further your writing career.”

Then I got married, moved across the country, and had a baby. In a matter of months, my entire frame of reference for living changed. The national economy no longer mattered to me nearly as much as getting more than four consecutive hours of sleep. Having had five novels published by this point, I had enough residual momentum in my career to keep the creativity trickling.

Then came *The Big Blow*. An environment which I had always perceived as supportive to my creativity became downright poisonous. I felt like someone had ripped out a piece of my soul and stomped it into oblivion. Creatively, I was alone.

I felt like I was on a desert island. Every idea I tried to put to paper turned to sand. For months, I struggled to regain the joy I’d once felt in playing with words. Finally, I just gave up.

Now I no longer had an ogre on my shoulder telling me I should be writing when I felt like exploring a different interest. I took up canning, and filled our

shelves with apple butter, peach butter, raspberry jam, and zucchini pickles. I taught myself to crochet, and ended up with a pretty afghan for our daughter’s bed.

The military moved us to a new location, so I explored home decor ideas while figuring out how to turn a beat-up house into a pleasant home. With a large yard, I had room to experiment with different arrangements and varieties of plants.

But *A Deadline* loomed. I’d signed the contract soon after our daughter was born, before I realized my creativity had moved and left no forwarding address. My husband had a couple of extra weeks off at Christmas that year, so he took over parenting duties and shut me in my office to write.

The first few days were hellish. I stared at the computer screen until dots danced before my eyes. The hum of the fan in the computer began to sound like a new form of torture. An invisible clock ticked away the minutes, keeping me constantly in mind of the deadline’s approach. If I didn’t produce something close to a story soon, we’d owe my publisher my advance. Needless to say, the cash wasn’t just sitting in our bank waiting to bail me out. I had no choice but to write the book.

In desperation, I visited the library, looking for clues to creativity. I noticed two books about creativity, both by the same author. I checked them out, then returned to my cave to see if I could find a way out of my nightmare.

That’s when I learned that creativity isn’t what I do, but rather how I look at life. The author of these two books gave me permission to view myself as creative, regardless of whether I wrote another word. I even tried some of the self-help exercises she suggested.

I began to feel a glimmer of the old “writing excitement.” I realized I’d become so obsessed with what I thought my creativity should be that I’d only

succeeded in stifling it. Word by word, my story began to eke onto paper. Just one chapter out of the thirteen total came with that glorious rush of thoughts that produces page after page with barely any noticeable effort.

The story itself was rough, and required more input from the copy editor than any of my previous works. But it did get published, and even generated some of the most enthusiastic reader response I've ever had.

Most important, it helped me find my creative voice again. This time, the creativity came with its own confidence. Gone was the fear of losing the opportunity or wasting my energy. I'd lost the spark, and lived to see it reappear. I began to pursue other creative interests, this time not to run from my writing, but to see if they would nurture it.

Sewing, crafts, scrapbooks, cake decorating . . . the list of my interests continues to grow. As does my love

for the creative life I've chosen. My writing remains the creative expression with which I still hope to be able to earn a living, and maybe garner a little fame. The other avenues of expression feed my soul, renew the energy that gets depleted after hours of trying to make my imagination come alive on paper.

We now have two children, and writing time feels scarcer than sleep. There are times I hear my old mentor's voice, denigrating my investment in anything but my family and the written word. Then I take a moment to light a candle I made last week, and to savor the creative combination of color and pattern which decorate my daughter's bedroom. The glow of accomplishment makes me feel both clever and strong.

*Strong enough to face even the next blank page and the next looming deadline.*

# Bits'n'Pieces

## Bookstore Links Outside the USA

[provided by Cathy Clamp on the NINClink]

### Australia:

Angus & Robertson, <http://www.angusrobertson.com.au>

Boomerang Books, <http://books.boomerangbooks.com>

SeekBooks, <http://www.seekbooks.com.au>

*(if your book is romance, then these next few are TERRIFIC! They LOVE American books!)*

Siren Books, <http://www.sirenbooks.com>

Galaxy Bookshop, <http://www.galaxybooks.com.au>

Rendezvous, The Romance Bookstore, <http://www.rendezvousbooks.com>

### Canada:

McNally Robinson, <http://www.mcnallyrobinson.com>

Chapters/Indigo, <http://www.chapters.indigo.ca>

### New Zealand:

Surf N' Save, <http://www.1website.co.nz>

### Sweden:

SF-Bokhandeln, <http://www.sfbok.se>

### UK:

Murder One Books, <http://www.murderone.co.uk>

Waterstone's, <http://www.waterstones.com> or  
<http://www.amazon.co.uk>

BookFellas, <http://www.bookfellas.co.uk>

WH Smith, <http://www.whsmith.co.uk>

DVD.CO.UK, <http://www.dvd.co.uk>

Blackwell's, <http://bookshop.blackwell.co.uk>

## What's in a Name?

MacKenzie Bezon's first novel, *The Testing of Luther Albright*, makes its debut with conflicting numbers on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. The book is listed as high as 2,000 on Amazon but only near 24,000 on B&N. The best irony is that seven used copies have already been put on sale. Why the hype? She is Jeff Bezos' wife. While getting some media coverage in the US due to her spouse, her status is going unnoticed in the UK.



# *The Care and Feeding of the Girls in the Basement . . .*

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

## *Staying Power*

I've just returned from the annual pilgrimage to the National RWA conference, held this year in Reno. Throughout the whole thing, I was nagged by a little oddity, just out of my peripheral vision, a something that was not quite materializing.

One afternoon, three of us sat in someone's room, telling war stories, lifting up a hem or pushing aside a swath of hair or holding out hands to show off our marks and stripes and scars, our badges rattling with the metal of a dozen conference pins and little statues. We nibbled almonds and Cheeze-its and chocolate and told stories that started with "Remember when...." "And that time we...." Remember when one was divorced, another reunited with her soulmate, when a boy was in trouble, another had a broken leg, another a girlfriend he adored. Remember when we all met, back when the light was fresh and the possibilities were endless, unfurling before us like the yellow-brick road?

There were stories of long droughts, finally broken, and stories of writers we can't remember anymore, people who were in the trenches with us who escaped the battle at some point or another, never to be seen again. We moaned over house repairs that just happen to cost exactly what's left of the advance sitting in the

bank account, and cheered over everyone—for once—having health insurance.

Later, I wandered around the Literacy Signing, having chosen to forego the—er—pleasure for a year. It's not that I plan to give it up forever, I've just had so much going on for the last few months that I wanted to take it a little easier at this conference, try to get some R&R rather than just work every single day until I came home even more exhausted (although I still did).

Starting the conference with that intense, overwhelming three-hour marathon of a signing is brutal. Like many of you, I absolutely loathe it. All that hunger, all those voices, the bad light, the echoey noise, the sheer stamina required—it's exhausting. So I gave myself permission to skip it this time (and judging by the responses I heard to my decision as I wandered around, maybe everyone should allow themselves to skip it once in awhile).

What intrigued me, as I wandered around, talking to friends, congratulating acquaintances who were finalists, was that I saw so many, many new faces, so many new names. Writers at the start of their careers, some a year or two or three in, with bright eyes and untarnished smiles. Hope hung in the air like whis-

pered prayers, perfumed the aisles with desire. Anoint me. And me. And me.

Another friend of mine, one who has been going through a difficult period, said she'd only been able to stand the signing for a few minutes, and had to leave. It wasn't that she felt jealous or wished to be there, she said, it was that she almost couldn't bear what those eager newcomers had yet to learn. As Bob Seger says so poignantly, "Wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then."

That was when the nagging thing gelled: the thing that had been nagging at me was the fact that my buddies and I have become veterans. Not yet wise women, not elders, but absolutely veterans. I sold my first book 18 years ago. If my career was a child, it would be graduating from high school!

I'm not sure why this was such a stunning surprise, but I do know it was hitting all of us in one way or another. Perhaps there were more young writers in attendance, but I doubt it. It was more likely just time to notice and pay homage to the surprise of staying in the game such a long time. And it is a long time. We all, those of us who do this, know that.

And where, we asked ourselves, do we go from here? How do you set new goals at this stage, what do you take into account? Do you trudge along, wincing against the noonday sun, wishing for dawn?

I know there are writers, some my good friends, who have been writing twice my 18 years. A group of long-time writers gave a talk at this conference, as a matter of fact: they called themselves The Marathoners (which I wasn't able to fit in, though I would have liked to have heard it), and it's an apt phrase. My group and I have run about a half marathon so far, and I can see that this is another marker period—there seems to be a bit of reckoning that goes on through this stretch, and it's not easy.

The light in our worlds is not that fresh, dewy dawn of a new career. The issues are different. What's working? What isn't? How do you start over? How many times do you have to reinvent yourself for heaven's sake? Didn't we all think it would be a little bit easier than this? Some of us are giving up or about to, even after 15 years or better. Some of the writers we started with have been tripped by life or their careers or cannot make any progress and go find something else to do that's not so brutal. Some have fallen ill and left us.

But when I look at the rest of us, I see some commonalities. Almost no one starts in one place and stays there forever. We change and grow. I started in category, wrote Special Editions, added in medievals, moved to Intimate Moments because Special readers were more conservative than IM readers and my books tended to be a bit quirky. Switched to Georgian his-

toricals because medievals weren't selling, gave up historicals when it became absolutely clear (it took me awhile) that lighter historicals were the wave of the future and I'd never be able to write them well. Tried my hand at longer contemporaries, liked it, liked it more, then tried straight women's fiction, and fell madly in love, but then I missed romances (is there anything on the planet as exquisitely emotional as a good category romance? It's impossible to do that in any other format.) and started adding in a category here and there. Which is where it stands at the moment. My good friends have pretty much the same sort of path—starting one place, going with one area, then another, finding a fit, losing an editor, finding a wildly supportive publisher, etc.

We all do this. If we don't, we don't last. Flexibility, an openness to change, is critically important. Markets change and die and new ones are born.

Survivors also seem to have created solid networks of like-minded (and sometimes not so like minded) others who provide support, chocolate, wine, and editorial guidance as required. I suppose there must be some lone wolves among us, but I'm not one of them. I need my sisters.

Another thing we share is perspective. There is always a brand new, young, fresh face exploding on the scene—funny how fifteen or twenty years later, it all evens out. You learn a disaster this year might not mean disaster forever, and, fortunately or unfortunately, we also know a big advance or a big splash don't necessarily translate to success in the market. It's also true that success comes and goes, and often, there seems to be no reason to it.

Are there things I wish I didn't know? Maybe. I do think I imagined it might someday get a little bit more reliable. That if you could get to a certain level of critical mass, then you'd have it made.

I don't think I knew how much other work there would be—the things that are not writing, but connected to it, that take a lot of time. I know I didn't realize how hard I would work, and continue to work, year after year after year. Writing is hard work. That keeps surprising me.

At times, I wished to have a single, steady editor in my corner. Instead, I have worked with more than two dozen, and I've learned from all of them. I've often wished for a steadier income, but as writers go, I've done all right and I usually remember in time not to bitch too much about it.

There are things I'm grateful for, too, after being in the business for such a long time. Remember feeling sick over meeting an editor for lunch? Rehearsing what you'd say? (Then reliving all the dumb things you said instead?) In the beginning, I used to have to write out what I was going to say to an editor before I ▶



## The Girls in the Basement . . . *Staying Power*

► called, or I'd be too nervous to do it. I'm glad that doesn't bother me anymore.

I'm grateful that I know what to do at a bad book-signing, and I try not to take it personally. I know that bad covers happen to everybody, not just to me. I've been around long enough to know that you'd better be nice to people, because it's a teeny-tiny world, baby, and what goes around definitely comes around. Times ten. I'm happy to have been in the company of such astoundingly intelligent women for so many years—bright, thoughtful, creative people.

I'm grateful that a twenty-year career can lead to a forty- or sixty-year career in this business. As long as the mind is sound, I can keep writing. I'm grateful that I learn something nearly every day, and I have every

day I've worked, and I'll keep learning things about it until I die, because you just can't ever know everything there is to know about writing.

Oh, and remember—it's September. Celebrate your writerhood, your writing life, your author life, your book life. Take some time and write ten things that are great about being a writer. My favorite of the year: writing a foreword for one of my favorite books of all time, *Green Darkness*.

What's yours?

*Barbara Samuel is currently drunk on the scent of rain, which has poured in torrents through the writing of this piece, thus breaking the longest, hottest spell in memory. Visit her webpage at [www.barbarasamuel.com](http://www.barbarasamuel.com)*

### Bits'n'Pieces

#### Creative Sales Techniques

Part 1: Maggie Topkis of Partners in Crime (NYC Greenwich Village) created Felony & Mayhem Press, because she was aggravated by so many requests for out of print titles. F&M will publish six titles every other month that will only be available in independent bookstores, with distribution through independent reps. Among the first offerings are Caroline Graham's *The Killing at Badger's Drift* which begins the Chief Inspector Barnaby series, and Lynn Hightower's *Satan's Lambs*. Future releases from Julian Symons, Stuart Kaminsky, and Robert Barnard are also slated.

Part 2: HarperCollins and William Morrow have a new slant on summer promotion, lowering prices on select books by four midlist authors to \$16.95 each, hardcover. The promotion is already paying off, with orders for the books almost double that of each author's previous book. The four books were Reed Arvin's *Blood of Angels*, Chuck Logan's *Homefront*, G.M. Ford's *No Man's Land*, and Mark Bellingham's *The Burning Girl*. While publicists don't find down-pricing an easy sell, the offerings are mostly from the middle of series by the authors. If the sell through can match the orders, the publishers may try this gambit again.

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