

Writer's Block? Maybe Not!

BY DIANNE DRAKE

That blank stare you've been focusing on your computer screen for the past hour is getting you nowhere. You're not even sure you could scare up an idea, let alone string together a coherent sentence, although your editor is pointing a loaded contract, with the word *deadline* underlined in red, at you.

It's writer's block, you think. What else could it be? It'll go away when you: refocus your efforts; take a walk to clear your mind; chant the "I can do this" mantra; eat more chocolate; bribe the muse; all of the above.

Or, none of the above, if you're not experiencing writer's block at all, but one of several conditions that can sneak up on you, creep in, wreak havoc without major symptoms, but eventually cause the mental fuzz, slush, or mush—if left untreated—that can destroy your ability to put that word on the page.

Take a look at three common illnesses and afflictions lurking about more and more these days, just waiting to get that muse in a choke hold.

LET THE SUN SHINE IN

Remember how Annie, the curly-haired optimist, burst onto the stage singing about how the sun will come out tomorrow? Great sentiment, especially during the gray days of winter. You know those days. You wake up, look at the dull sky, pull the covers

over your head, and decide this is the first day of your hibernation—go away, leave me alone, let me sleep, wake me in the Spring!

We've all been there, done that. Once in a while is normal. We need it. Doing this on a daily basis, however, could be a symptom of more than just your love affair with your mattress. It could be a disorder, identified only in the past 25 years, that zaps you of more than just the will to get up and write.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a condition resulting from a lack of sunlight between the months of September and April, zaps up to 28% of the North American population on a regular basis, depending upon where you live. For example, only 1% of bright, sunny Miami's population suffers from SAD, whereas people who live near the US-Canadian border are in the 10% range. Move on up to Fairbanks, Alaska while you're trying to write that book, and you're at risk of sliding into the 28% of those who suffer SAD symptoms. While SAD has been widely studied in North America, it can and does occur elsewhere, and always during the months associated with prolonged periods of darker, gloomier weather. Symptoms include:

► **Depression:** Your feelings of self-worth vanish, although, according to Dr. Michael Bagby of Toronto's Clark Institute of Psychiatry, "They come back when the SAD season is over." This can go to

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Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

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Address changes may be made on the website.
For members without Internet access, send
changes to the Central Coordinator.

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Introducing

*We have no new applicants to present
this month.*

New Members:

Lynn Kerstan, Coronado CA
Nancy Holder, San Diego CA
Keri Arthur Wallan, Victoria
Australia
Sheila Finch, Long Beach CA
Shirley Kennett, Eureka MO
Renee Luke, Antelope CA
Libby Sternberg, Lancaster PA

Ninc has room to grow...

Recommend membership
to *your* colleagues. Prospective members
may apply online at ninc.com.

Refer members at ninc.com. Go to Mem-
bers Only, "Member Services" and click
"Refer a New Member to Ninc."

Heading to a conference? Take some Ninc
brochures. Contact Holly Jacobs at
HollyJacobs1@aol.com with your mailing
address and the number of brochures
wanted and she'll get them out to you asap.

Mark your calendars—you don't want to miss this one.

It's time to "Open a new window"
Sweep away all those career woes...
discover how to "create and recognize new
opportunities."

Ninc Conference 2008

March 27 - 30

New York

Affinia Manhattan

affinia.com

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Launching Ninc's Legal Fund

It's here. As of May 1, members of Novelists, Inc., have a major new benefit: the Ninc Legal Fund.

Conference attendees in San Diego, careful readers of Ninclink, and devoted fans of this column (ahem) already have been introduced to the general outline of the Legal Fund. For those craving more details, the Guidelines are included in this issue and will be available, along with the Application, at ninc.com in the Members Only section.

The idea behind the Ninc Legal Fund is to provide members who are hit with legal issues connected to their career as authors of published fiction (excluding contract negotiation) a place to start. We can all envision members discovering their work has been plagiarized, being hit with a lawsuit for slander, or having someone claim his life was "stolen" and put in a book. After the first knock-you-flat shock, what do you do? What's the first step to getting your feet back under you and dealing with the problem?

If you're a member of Ninc, you access the Legal Fund.

This gives you up to two hours of legal consultation with the Ninc Legal Fund lawyer. No one expects that to be enough to solve major issues, but it will give our members an opportunity to assess their situation with a legal professional they know has experience in the business and who's on their side...and without having to steal the kids' lunch money for the next 22 years.

In addition, we've put in a provision that allows members who might share a specific legal issue to pool their time...within limits and based on the NLF Lawyer's judgment that multiple authors would be best-served by such a pooling.

So, that's the idea behind the Legal Fund—a sort of legal triage insurance for our members.

There are limitations, of course. You'll see more of the basic ones in the Guidelines. But I'd like to address one that's found more between the lines there than spelled out—the NLF well can run dry in any given calendar year, and refilling it the next year will depend on how well Ninc is doing financially.

The Board set it up this way to protect a.) Ninc's tax status, b.) Ninc's overall financial stability.

When I started researching this idea last fall, I

talked to representatives of groups—some writing, some not—who have offered variations of legal help to members. Several have dropped their programs. Others have set theirs up as loans, rather than outright services. The feeling of your Board was that a loan, even one not assiduously collected, imposed another burden on a member already facing enough issues.

Most of these outside sources predicted that members would pile on from the start and use up the fund's resources in a blink. I kept telling them they didn't know Ninc and they didn't know our members, and that Ninc's Board has great faith in the good sense of our members.

Your Board believes that members will use the fund responsibly.

On the other hand, we're not so giddily optimistic as to just hope for the best and fail to plan for the worst.

With guidance from lawyer Matt Hoy, who practices in Kansas (where Ninc is incorporated) and has experience with non-profit writers groups as Sisters-in-Crime's lawyer, we set up safeguards for how the fund can be used and how much of Ninc's budget can go into it. (Details are in "How It Will Work" on Page 5.) A major consideration in setting the budgetary limit came from Matt's warnings to ensure that our tax status would not be called into question. There is a ceiling on the percentage of our budget that can go to such benefits, and we wanted to ensure we left a cushion so future Boards can add future benefits.

(By the way, we consciously used a lawyer to help us set this up who said himself that he wasn't a good candidate to be the NLF Lawyer, because we figured all his interests would be in putting in safeguards for Ninc. His services were extremely useful. He also added to a questionnaire for candidates that the Board put together.)

So, once we worked out our guidelines and application process with Matt's assistance, we went looking for the NLF Lawyer.

We ended up with five incredibly strong finalists for the position. Between us, President-Elect Laura Resnick and I talked to each candidate and all responded to the questionnaire.

We also vetted them through sources and ▶

their local bar associations.

We were so pleased at the end of our long process to feel it was a can't-lose situation for Ninc, because any one of the finalists would do a great job. And they were all excited about and supportive of this program. In fact, the other four finalists have agreed to be people we can call on if there is a conflict of interest for the NLF Lawyer and to be listed on our website as resources for members.

So, let me introduce our Ninc Legal Fund Lawyer:

David Bruce Wolf heads the litigation department at New York firm Cowan DeBaets Abraham & Sheppard LLP,



David Bruce Wolf
Photo Courtesy Cowan DeBaets Abraham & Sheppard LLP

focusing on entertainment, literary property, intellectual property.

He has a BA and a Masters in Comparative Literature from Yale, then received his JD from Penn and a LLM (postgraduate law degree) in copyright trademark from NYU. He also teaches copyright litigation at Fordham.

Wolf said, "I am very happy to be your Legal Fund Lawyer and I look forward to being of assistance."

And he has repeatedly expressed enthusiasm for solving the problems of authors—exactly what we hope the Legal Fund will do for our members.



A huge thank-you to Ginger Chambers for all that she's done in updating and adding to ninc.com. Check page 6 for new website offerings and welcome new chair Elle James.

— **Pat McLaughlin**

Conference Recaps:

Negotiate Like You Mean It

Presented by Anita Fore, Esq., Director of Authors Guild Legal Services, provided a handout of boilerplate contract clauses edited to benefit the author. She emphasized that often when a new clause begins to appear in contracts that those authors striving to have it changed will be told it's the standard or a deal breaker, and that we shouldn't be discouraged but should continue to try to influence change. Authors continually questioning clauses leads to new standards in the industry. She encouraged authors to ask for bonus clauses in their contracts. She also recommends joining the Authors Guild. One of their services includes reviewing members' contracts.

Life in the Fast Lane

Federal Agent Mike Unzueta led us through his fascinating career, including his training to work undercover. Unknown to the trainee who was given a task of gathering information, training scenarios were designed so the trainee would be killed. The true purpose of the scenarios was not to teach the trainee how to get the information; it was to teach him how to recognize that he needed to get out of the situation or "exit the kill zone." Agent Unzueta discussed bombs, commercial arson, and Immigration and

Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.).

Books to Film Workshop

SUMMARIZED BY LAURA TAYLOR

Ken Sherman, a Beverly Hills based literary agent, represents film, TV, and book writers, as well as producers and directors. He defined the "new" Hollywood for Ninc members during his workshop, stressing the value of:

- Submitting one book at a time (with a concise 2-page synopsis) to a film agent
- Not writing scripts for existing film-making trends but rather from the heart
- Creating an effective log-line or pitch which defines the thematic intent of the book in order to facilitate the marketing work of a film agent
- Acquiring an understanding of the film community and what it costs in real dollars to produce a film based on your book
- Reserving a majority interest in the subsidiary rights of our book contracts
- Monitoring the submission of our books by our publishers to potential film markets.

Bottom line: Original stories that are character-driven sell, so understand your marketplace and address its needs.

Novelists, Inc. Legal Fund Guidelines

Statement of purpose:

- The Board of Directors of Novelists, Inc. (“Ninc”) has established a Legal Fund to allow members initial access to legal counsel in order to assess a legal issue stemming from the member’s status as a professional author of fiction.
- The Legal Fund may be terminated at any time at the sole discretion of the Board of Directors.
- These Guidelines may be modified, amended or revoked at any time as is appropriate at the sole discretion of the Board of Directors.
- Ninc is a tax-exempt IRC § 501(c)(6) corporation and these Guidelines shall be interpreted and the Fund managed in such a manner as to preserve that tax-exempt status.

Limitations of use:

- Members must sign the Legal Fund Application form before having access to the Fund.
- Only for issues stemming from member’s status as a professional author of fiction.
- Not for negotiation of publishing contract terms.
- Limited to two hours of billed time per member per year, in no case to exceed [dollar amount equivalent to two hours billed time] so long as sufficient reserves remain in the Legal Fund (as determined at the discretion of the Board of Directors of Ninc).
- Multiple members involved in a single legal action may pool their time up to a limit of ten billed hours.
- If multiple members seek to use the Fund as opposing parties in a legal situation in which both Applications to utilize the Fund are granted, the first to make his/her request will receive access to the Fund lawyer. The Member who is an opposing party to the Applicant using the Fund lawyer will have access to a list of lawyers approved by the Board of Directors and the Fund will be used to pay the equivalent dollar amount as is allowed for the first party.
- A member who willfully disregards the guidelines, falsifies the Application or otherwise abuses the use of the Fund (in the sole discretion of the Board of Directors of Ninc) may be required to pay any related expenses incurred and may be denied future use of the Fund.

- If a Director of Ninc wishes to use the Fund, such Director shall be removed from the proceedings considering such Director’s application.
- Ninc will retain or otherwise make arrangements with the designated Fund lawyer and other lawyers as needed.
- In all instances, members using a lawyer who is paid from the Fund shall enter into their own attorney-client arrangement with such lawyers and Ninc shall have no involvement in such relationship other than to pay for attorneys’ fees as described herein and as approved with regard to the member’s Application.

Financing the fund:

- Total amount in the Ninc Legal Fund cannot exceed 10 percent of Ninc’s income for the prior year.

HOW IT WILL WORK:

- Board will select Fund Lawyer and negotiate a retainer/escrow agreement.
- The Application will be available online at the Ninc website in the Members Only section.
- Member requesting use of the Fund will have to complete and sign the Application then mail, fax or send it as an attached email to President, who will inform the rest of the Board.
- The Board will (through the whole Board or a committee of the Board, as determined on a case-by-case basis) determine whether the request to use the Legal Fund for attorney assistance as described in the Application is granted.
- If the request to use the Legal Fund for attorney assistance as described in the Application is granted, a member of the Board will inform the Fund lawyer that the member has requested use of the fund and has signed the Application form, and will notify the Applicant of such decision and provide the contact information of the Fund lawyer.
- If the request to use the Legal Fund for attorney assistance as described in the Application is not granted, a member of the Board will inform the Applicant of such decision.
- The treasurer will keep the Board informed of the status of the fund, based on statements from the lawyer. ▲

If you haven't visited the Novelists, Inc. website, ninc.com, lately, you might be surprised by the changes you'll find there. The overall look is more streamlined, the pages more functional. In addition, we've added the following new Directories for the exclusive use of our members:

- ▷ *Agent Directory* — Up-to-date information, which also includes agent website URLs.
- ▷ *Editor Directory* — With your continued input, keeps up with the game of editorial musical chairs.
- ▷ *Literary Lawyer Directory* — For those in need of specialized assistance.
- ▷ *Members' Publisher/Imprint Directory* — If you have a question about a publisher or line, you can locate members who may provide the answer.

As well, direct access is provided to:

- ▷ Ninc's terrific *Agent Guide*.
- ▷ *NINK Archives*.
- ▷ A new and improved *Reference/Resources/Research* area.

The Members Only main page has been renovated and offers links to:

- ▷ *News* that is of current interest.
- ▷ *NINK/ninc.com in Partnership* articles.
- ▷ *Golden Oldies from NINK* — Presently, Evan Maxwell's "East of the Hudson" columns are being reprinted.
- ▷ *The Wisdom of Ninclink* where Q&As discussed on Ninclink are catalogued for general use.
- ▷ *BookBusiness Blogs*.
- ▷ *Member Services*, which include:
 - Access to easily *Update Your Membership Profile*.
 - An *Authors Coalition Survey* form that can be completed online, or printed and mailed.
 - The new *Refer a Member to Ninc*, where you fill in a prospect's name and email address, and we send an invitation to join Ninc.
 - A link to *Subscribe to Ninclink*.
 - Information about *Ninc's Publishers Weekly discount*.
- ▷ *Ninc Business* — Links to all the important functions that allow Novelists, Inc. to be a viable organization:
 - *Board of Directors/Committees* — Find out who the current leaders of Ninc are and how to contact them with ideas, information, and/or to volunteer a small portion of your time.
 - *Board Minutes*.

- *Accounting Reports*, the *By-laws*, the *Policies & Procedures Manual*, and an *Expense Reimbursement Report Form*.

Another recent addition to the Members Only section is our *In Memoriam* page where we can mourn the passing of Ninc colleagues.

Available for Public viewing and Member use, the *Conference Center* was greatly expanded for this year's conference and is set to be the framework for future Conference Centers.

And if you enjoy playing "The Top Ten Reasons..." game, be sure to check out the website's *Top Ten Reasons to Join Novelists, Inc.* (A hat tip to Ninclink for all the suggestions!)

As I said earlier, there have been a number of changes at *ninc.com* over the past year-and-a-half or so. It's been a lot of fun and very rewarding to be Ninc's first, official Website Committee Chair. I'm proud of where I've been able to take the website, but I didn't do it alone. Special thanks go to Pat McLaughlin, Brenda Hiatt Barber, Vicki Lewis Thompson, and two very special Webmasters, Craig and Tina, and all the others who've helped along the way to make the website a useful tool for all members.

Yes, that does sound like an ending, doesn't it? It is, for me as Website Committee Chair. Now it's *Elle James's* turn to be the Chair. You can reach her at ellejames@earthlink.net. And I'm sure I speak for her when I say that any suggestions and/or assistance will be greatly appreciated.

You won't be rid of me completely, though. I'll still maintain the Agent Directory and the Editor (Publisher) Directory. So here's a plea—would each of you please take a moment to look at both Directories to see if your agent information and the information about your editor/publisher (or any editor/publisher you're familiar with) is correct? If it's not, you can correct the *agent* information online by clicking the *Update Your Membership Profile* link, and correct the Editor (Publisher) information by contacting me directly at gingerchambers@sbcglobal.net.

Also contact me if, over the past few months, you've entered information about your agent, and your name or agent's name isn't listed in the Agent Directory. There was a small blip in the process that's been corrected, but it's left a few orphans that I can't find a client for. (Specifically, agents: Mel Berger, Robert Diforio, and Andrea Somberg.)

Again, thanks for allowing me to be your Website Committee Chair and let's all give a rousing cheer of welcome for our new Chair—*Elle James!*

— **Ginger Chambers,**
Former Website Committee Chair

Membership Questions

I'm an inclusive person by nature. If I'm at a conference and see someone sitting alone, I invite her to join me. I belong to writers' lists for only published writers and lists for non-published but aspiring writers. I like people. And of all the people I surround myself with, I'm going to confess, writers are some of my favorites. After all, they get it. They understand stories that carry you away, writers' blocks that hamper your story. They get flying high on success, as well as facing rejections and trying to make it in an industry that's not always easy on the ego or the wallet.

I tend to be quiet on Ninclink, but that doesn't mean I'm not out there, enjoying the conversations and this writing community I'm fortunate enough to be a part of. And I know when my writing schedule does permit me to delurk, I'll be welcomed. The acceptance and camaraderie is why I joined Ninc. I took the job as membership chair because of that love for this particular community.

One of the lovely things about Ninc is its fairly loose requirements for membership. Unfortunately, as membership chair, I've discovered one of the nightmares about Ninc is its fairly loose requirements for membership. They read: "You must have published at least two novels that are readily available to the general public. Their primary distribution must have been paper-published and bound as hardback, trade paperback, or mass market books. Self-published novels and novels published only in electronic form do not qualify. In addition, at least one of your novels must have been published within the last five years prior to your application for membership. The membership committee may request proof of eligibility in some circumstances. You must also agree to have your name and a mailing address published in our membership roster (telephone number is optional). And you must agree to keep our membership roster confidential. This ensures our members' privacy and security."

When dealing with small, obscure publishers, interpreting the rules can be tough. For instance, just what does "readily available" mean? Does it mean available in a concrete sort of bookstore, or is an online bookstore sufficient? And if it's available in that concrete store, does that mean it's in stock on the shelves, or simply that the staff can order it through Ingrams or B&T? If just available online, does that mean through big online booksellers like Amazon and Barnes and Noble, or is simply being available through a publisher's site enough?

If the writer has a financial stake in her book, like with a vanity press, I'm pretty clear it's a no-go. But do I worry about things like whether an advance is

paid? Do I worry about the publisher's track record? A recent question had to do with a small publisher who, although it paid a royalty, also subtracted fees for cover art and other expenses relating to developing the book, from those royalties. Would the author qualify?

I don't feel as if my personal call on some of these issues is enough. I'm not representing myself in this instance, I'm representing the Ninc organization...I'm representing you. And as such, I have to look at each applicant through a Ninc filter, trying to gauge what best represents the intent of our membership rules. Given the speed with which the industry is changing, with the availability of books online, and the access to new technologies, it's hard for me to accurately pinpoint where certain publishers fall—within our boundaries, or outside the bounds.

In Hollyworld, all writers are welcome <g>, but in Nincworld, there are guidelines. As membership chair, I don't mind seeing to it that incoming members meet our criteria, but my job would be much easier if some of that criteria was clarified. I'm not necessarily talking about clarifying them on our membership page, but clarifying for me and future membership chairs would make the job much easier. Pat McLaughlin mentioned this in the last issue of *NINK*. This is my follow-up request that you all make your thoughts on the issue known. What direction do you want Ninc's membership to take? This is your organization and your input isn't just requested, but truly needed. Please contact any of us and share your thoughts, concerns, and comments.

— **Holly Jacobs, Membership Chair**

Business Briefs

Borders Rewards Are Supposed to Improve:

It's back to the drawing board for Border Rewards. Instead of a limited period for redemptions, members will have \$5 Borders Buck coupons after spending \$150 at the store. Coupons will be emailed at the beginning of the month after the member has reached the monetary goal and be good for an entire month. By only allowing a holiday redemption, the stores didn't see an influx of customers, which is the aim of the revised program. Apparently Borders doesn't want to allow a discount with every purchase in the tradition of the defunct Waldenbooks program (cancelled by Borders in 2005) or the current B&N membership card.

—**"Briefs" compiled by Sally Hawkes**

Writer's Block...Not

Continued from page 1 your feelings of self-worth as a writer, too. Quite literally, your ability to plot, put together a synopsis, edit, or do anything else associated with the writing process can become a whole lot tougher. Why? Decision-making can be affected. So can your ability to concentrate. Mind wandering, starting off blankly into space, sitting in the dark, doubting your ability to ever write another book again...

Sound familiar? If so, take an objective look at your writing process. When are you at your best? Do you go sluggish during the months when you're not exposed to as much sunlight? Do you feel like a writing lump in January but turn into a writing machine in May or June when the sun is in full shine again?

► **Appetite Change and Weight Gain:** Your appetite increases, especially for carbs, and you crave the sweets (chocolate!) that give you a quick energy boost. You'd rather eat that candy bar, scarf down that doughnut, belly up to the ice cream bowl than write. Yes, this can officially be your excuse for all the chocolate you consume, but if you're doing this more during SAD season than you do during the rest of the year, it could be SAD.

A dietary fix is easy, though. Cut back on the fast sugars (candy, cake, cookies, refined sugar products). It's as simple as that. They might give you the momentary energy boost you need and satisfy that craving, but the good benefits fall off too quickly, and in an hour or two you're right back where you started—craving the bad carbs.

So, why is that bad? Can't I just load up for the sugar boost every time I feel the crave? The answer is, yes, you can. But you'll gain weight for starters. And you'll cause blood sugar problems because fast sugars result in a rapid rise and fall in blood sugar levels which, in turn, leaves you feeling lethargic when the sugar boost wears off. Up and down, then crash—your body's not getting the long-term source of energy it needs, and the short-term substitute coming in the form of a fast sugar just doesn't cut it. Your brain needs a constant feed of energy to perform at its best, and the ups and downs of sugar snacking literally throw it into a tizzy. Sugar high, lethargy, sugar high, lethargy.

Not good for the body, the brain, or your next novel.

But you've got to snack! You're craving something. Body's not going to be happy until you feed it, but instead of going after the sugary stuff calling your name, go nuts instead. Nuts are a great source of protein, which releases long-term, steady energy into your body. And if you want to go straight to the top of the nut heap—go walnuts! They're packed full of omega-3, a brain-essential nutrient also found in fish, that has a great energy-regulating property—one your brain

truly loves. Research is showing that walnuts may also be beneficial in controlling blood sugar levels in diabetes, too.

► **Lethargy and Sleeping Too Much:** You're tired when you get out of bed in the morning, so you crawl back in the first chance you get, or at least, take your first nap after breakfast, if not before. You're too tired to write, you doze off during the most critical love, murder, or resolution scene, or you wake yourself up snoring through your plot twist. No matter how much sleep you get, it's never enough. SAD is definitely on the list of contenders here, but other sleep disorders like apnea can also cause the same lethargy. If you're sleeping more than you should, more than you normally do, more than you want, keep a sleep diary. Give it to your doctor!

► **No interest in sex during the SAD season:** Not in your personal life, probably not in your heroine or hero, either. And it's not just your sex life that suffers—it's your interest level in other things you might normally love to do. Maybe you just don't feel like reading a good book the way you usually do. Or going out on the town for an evening seems like too much effort. If, during SAD time, the things you love to do just aren't that appealing, it could be a sign you're suffering the effects.

First recognized as a medical condition in 1984 by Dr. Norman Rosenthal, SAD comes in varying degrees. Rosenthal explains, "At one end of the spectrum are those who have few, if any, seasonal changes." Then there are those who experience mild depression and minor symptoms that don't necessarily affect their lives adversely. "But at the far end of the spectrum are patients with SAD whose changes in mood and behavior are so powerful that they produce significant problems in their lives." Problems that can affect your quality of life, relationships, and yes, your writing.

Who gets SAD?

Anyone living in an area without the benefit of full sunlight can be affected by seasonal changes. Women are four times more likely to suffer the symptoms than men, and the most common age for onset is between 20 and 40. But if you don't fall into these groups, that doesn't mean you can't be afflicted. *You can.* SAD has been identified in virtually every age group and in geographical areas not commonly associated with it. However, if you're not bothered during the low-sunlight months, there's probably nothing to worry about. But keep these two things in mind:

1. Onset can happen at any time.
2. Researchers estimate that one in four will experience seasonal symptoms at some time in their lives.

In other words, SAD can happen even when you're pretty sure it can't. But here's the thing—you can't diagnose yourself. According to Rosenthal, SAD symptoms mimic other serious medical conditions: under-

active thyroid gland, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and low blood sugar, to name a few. If you think you're SAD, it's time to see your doctor.

"SAD symptoms resemble some symptoms of clinical depression, too," says Bagby. "But seasonal disorders come and go with the seasons, while clinical depression does not."

Help's on the Way

If you think you're a SAD sufferer, call your doc, because you'll probably be poked and prodded a little to rule out other medical possibilities. Don't despair if you get a SAD diagnosis, though. While there's not one surefire treatment, not a convenient pill to pop either, there are ways to lessen, and even alleviate, the symptoms.

1. Take a walk in the sun on a regular basis. You'll be amazed at the changes a little sun will make. Try to walk when the sun is at its peak.

2. Cut trees and bushes away from your windows. Remove heavy drapes, curtains, and shutters that block the sun. Letting some natural sunlight in can really help. It can make all the difference in your writing, too, if you do this in your office. In other words, write in the light!

3. Add more light to your home or office. Add some wattage to those dim bulbs. The body *can* be tricked, even by artificial light sources. Also, if you're suffering SAD symptoms, you may be tempted to write in a dim room because it suits the way you're feeling. Don't! Turn on all the lights, drag in some extras if you have to. Unless your natural writing habit is to do it in the dim or dark, you could be having a SAD reaction.

4. Lighten your home or office with light fabrics, walls, and rugs. Again, don't write in a dungeon. Remember: Any lightness is good lightness.

5. Avoid stress. It compounds SAD symptoms. Pace your life, pace your deadlines. Keep deadline time free of other activities that are stressful.

6. Exercise. According to Dr. David McDonald, Professor of Psychology at the University of Missouri, "Aerobic exercise has a positive effect on moods. It reduces depression, tension and anxiety, and brings out a positive feeling of self-worth." Exercise in the sun if you can, or pull that NordicTrack over to the window and pretend you're cross-country skiing.

7. Do as the geese do and fly south to a sunny destination for a winter break. If you know you suffer from SAD, skip that July writers' conference and find one in January, *in a sunny location*. Even a short two- or three-day hop to somewhere bright can make a tremendous difference in the way you feel, which, in turn, will make a tremendous difference in the way you write.

8. Talk to your doctor about the benefits of a sun box. It simulates real sunlight, and a few minutes of exposure every day can work wonders.

For More Information: mayoclinic.com

THE SILENT KILLER

The ugly statistics tell this story. Nearly 21 million people in the United States have diabetes, but seven million of them don't know it yet. Of the 14 million who have been diagnosed, around 10 million are women, and each day, according to American Diabetes Association statistics, more than 2500 people are diagnosed with the disease.

What is diabetes?

According to experts at the American Diabetes Association, "Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches, and other foods into the energy needed for daily life." In other words, your body's insulin, which is produced in the pancreas, isn't doing its job. It's not keeping your blood sugar regulated. Instead, the glucose (sugar) needed for energy is building up in your blood, not in your body's cells where it's supposed to be, and this wreaks havoc with all sorts of bodily functions, including your energy level and mental sharpness—with a huge emphasis on mental sharpness. When blood sugar is out of control and rising, the higher it rises the more your brain goes sluggish. It's literally starving for the proper energy sources to feed it.

The most common form of diabetes is Type 2 or Adult Onset. It's seen in 95% of all cases these days, and especially in those who are:

- ▶ Over 45 (note that onset age is getting lower)
- ▶ Have a family history of the disease
- ▶ Are overweight
- ▶ Are sedentary or don't exercise regularly

If you see yourself in at least two of the risk categories, chances are you're at risk, too.

Warning Signs

Sometimes they're subtle, sometimes they're not. But whether or not you know they're there, they're playing fast and loose with your body, causing damage you probably didn't know was associated with the disease. And each and every warning sign can result in a devastating problem if it isn't treated. So check out the symptom list. Do you have a few, or even several of these?

- ▶ Frequent urination
- ▶ Unusual thirst
- ▶ Extreme hunger
- ▶ Unusual weight loss
- ▶ Irritability, jittery feeling
- ▶ Lack of concentration (a real deadline killer!)
- ▶ Frequent infections: skin, gum, bladder, vaginal
- ▶ Blurred vision
- ▶ Slow-healing cuts/bruises
- ▶ Tingling or numbness in your fingers and toes

If you have one or more symptoms and you fit into the risk categories, check with your doctor. Diagnosis is made through a series of simple blood ▶

tests. However, if you aren't experiencing any of these symptoms but you are still at risk, get the test anyway. One little stick of the needle could prevent serious diabetic complications and save your writing career or, more importantly, your life.

Will I Be Cured if I Cut Back on Sugar?

Unfortunately, no. Diabetes can't be cured yet. It can be greatly reduced, or kicked back to normal values and kept under control, but once the diagnosis is made, you're a diabetic, and it's a lifelong battle to keep the blood sugar levels in your body under control. But diabetes isn't an early death sentence the way it used to be, and it's not all doom and gloom now, because it can be controlled with lifestyle changes such as:

1. Strict attention to diet: When diabetes is diagnosed, nutritional counseling comes next. Believe it or not, the diet's not so strict. It's more a matter of balancing your food intake and watching your carbs than eliminating favorite foods. Ice cream can be allowed. So can chocolate. Maybe not in the proportions you'd prefer, but a little is better than none at all. Overall, diabetic philosophy and treatments have changed to be more lenient, but that doesn't mean a careful watch over your diet isn't required, because it is.

2. Exercise: Studies prove that regular exercise lowers the sugar level in your blood. Exercise also helps reduce excess weight, and weight loss also lowers blood sugar.

If lifestyle changes aren't enough to overcome the blood sugar problem, numerous medications are available to help with that. Don't start hyperventilating over the thought of a daily shot, though. There are pills, patches, and pumps, too, with new procedures on the horizon.

Warning!

Diabetes can never be controlled without the guidance of your physician. Too many complications can come of improperly treated diabetes: blindness, circulatory problems leading to amputation, kidney failure, heart problems, stroke, to name a few. If you suspect you are at risk for—or may already have—diabetes, call your doctor. Become the decisive and strong hero about whom you write and take the action you need to control the problem. If you don't, the problem will control you, and that's not a fitting ending to any book, or for any writer.

FMI: diabetes.org

RUNNING ON EMPTY

Do you feel like your energy tank isn't quite full, but you chalk it up to a hectic lifestyle, too much work or worry, trying to squeeze in some extra writing time, or anything else that accounts for your not-quite-peppy feeling?

About 15-20% of all childbearing-aged women

aren't quite so peppy either, and that number jumps to 40% for women who participate in strenuous exercise or physical activity. The cause is what was, years ago, advertised as "iron-poor, tired blood."

So what's the big deal? Can low levels of iron in the body make that much of a difference in the way you feel? In the way you act? In the way you think? Or write?

"It sure can," says Dr. Ian Newhouse, Associate Professor at the School of Kinesiology at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. There may be subtle signs, like lethargy. "They won't hit you like a hammer over the head at first, so you might not even notice the changes. But as your iron stores continue to lower, your symptoms will become more pronounced."

"Iron deficiency comes in three stages," says Dr. Angela Johnson, internal medicine specialist from Indianapolis, Indiana. In stage one and two, *neither of which carries a diagnosis of anemia*, iron levels are deficient. "Stage one usually doesn't present symptoms, but the beginnings of fatigue can be seen in the second stage." Stage three, however, is iron-deficiency anemia, and it comes with one or more of the following common symptoms:

- ▶ Exercise fatigue and weakness
- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Shortness of breath
- ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Increased intolerance to cold temperatures
- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Concentration difficulties (yep, there it is again!)

Treatment

"Ask your doctor for a blood work-up for iron deficiency or anemia, and discuss the treatment options before you undertake anything," says Johnson. Usually, the treatment is better diet and a prescription for

Recommended Daily Allowance of Iron	
Women	Men
Ages 15-51: 15 mg/day	Ages 11-18: 12 mg/day
Ages 51+: 10 mg/day	Ages 19 & Over 10 mg/day
Pregnant: 30 mg/day	
Breast feeding: 15 mg/day	

iron pills. But don't buy those pills OTC (over-the-counter) without first consulting your physician because 1 in 250 people suffers from a disorder called hereditary hemochromatosis (HH) where the body can't dump excess iron. HH results in liver, pancreas, heart, and skin damage. FMI on HH: ironoverload.org

Getting back to iron deficiency, one of the biggest steps in correcting the problem is overall nutrition. Besides following a proper diet, here are some simple tips to follow:

1. Keep a diet journal. Be honest. The way you eat could be a nutritional eye-opener.
2. Use iron-fortified cereals, either as breakfast or a snack food.
3. Use a cast iron pot for cooking. Iron from the pot absorbs into the food—this is not a myth.
4. Drink your coffee or tea two hours *after* your meal. Coffee contains polyphenols and tea contains tannins; both hinder iron absorption from 40 to 60%.

"If you're not a vegetarian, don't leave out the red meat," says Newhouse. "A moderate amount of lean, red meat is an extra defense against iron deficiency." In studies conducted at the University of Minnesota, female runners who ate only two or three servings of red meat a week had significantly higher levels of stored iron than those who ate no red meat at all. Better iron levels=better energy levels=better concentration=better writing. (Guarantees of an *NYT* bestseller not included, but a little red meat could be the start of one!) FMI: eatright.org

FINALLY

There are dozens of ailments that can drag you down physically and mentally, and give you that writer's block feeling. A day or two of a blank computer screen may not mean anything, but going beyond that should be checked, because it could be something other than your muse taking a vacation. Call your doctor, tell him/her your hero's in hot pursuit of a three-headed monster, his sword is raised to strike the one blow that will save the world, and for the life of you, you can't figure out what happens next. Make it known that something's blocking your writing process, and DO NOT accept the diagnosis of writer's block so quickly. What's blocking your writing could be another matter altogether.

Dianne Drake, former nurse, author of two consumer medical books and dozens of consumer medical advice articles, now writes medical romance for Harlequin. Her next two releases are A Child to Care For and The Rescue Doctor's Miracle Baby, due out in April and May, 2007.

A Few More Concentration Munchers

▶ **Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:** Symptoms include headaches; tiredness; dizziness; sleep disturbances; panic attacks; sudden-onset clumsiness; muscle pain; *indecision/confusion; lack of concentration.*

▶ **Chronic Fatigue Syndrome:** Symptoms include persistent fatigue; depression; headache; sleep problems; muscle aches; *memory loss; lack of concentration.*

▶ **Sleep Apnea:** Symptoms include excessive daytime sleepiness; restless sleep; loud snoring, glottal stops or choking when you sleep; loss of energy; irritability; mood changes; *forgetfulness; lack of concentration.*

▶ **Lyme Disease (from ticks):** Flu symptoms; general malaise; headaches; stiff neck; fatigue; sleep disturbances; mood changes; *memory loss; lack of concentration.*

▶ **Lead poisoning (yes, even adults may be afflicted by lead):** Symptoms include metallic taste in mouth; headache; lack of appetite; nausea/vomiting; mood swings; *memory problems; lack of concentration.*

This list is not complete—it's only a smattering of all the various conditions that can zap you of your ability to concentrate. But this does illustrate just how many ways a writer's concentration can be affected by something other than writer's block. Bottom line—if the writing's just not working the way it normally does, call the doctor.

Uninsured?

A lot of writers are. Here are some hints that might just help with some of those medical costs.

▶ Doctors who accept Medicare assignment have mandated office call fees, and they cannot discount below the fee schedule Medicare requires. However, many doctors will discount an office call down to that level, which can, in many cases, cut the office bill in half. Ask for a discount. Don't be shy. Simple office calls can run more than \$100 these days, and if you don't have insurance to comp that, why pay more if you don't have to? It never hurts to ask.

▶ Ask your pharmacist for a list of the drugs that are now deeply discounted, as little as \$4, if not free. They'll lead you to believe it's only a few antibiotics, but in fact, there are, at any given time, more than 300 drugs on that list (it does change from time to time). Check it out! Take that list to your doc and ask to have your drugs prescribed from it if possible.

▶ Some medical labs will discount, too. Before you get that blood work your doctor prescribed, do some comparative shopping, call around and ask specifically for discounted programs. ▲



**WRITING is
TAXING**

The IRS Giveth and the IRS Taketh Away

BY DIANE O'BRIEN KELLY

Aren't home offices great? Not only do you enjoy a three-second traffic-free commute, you can also work in your pajamas. What's more, the IRS allows you to deduct a portion of your utility bills, insurance, maintenance, and repairs, as well as a portion of your rent or mortgage, mortgage interest, and real estate taxes. It sounds too good to be true!

And it may be. Thanks to a tax rule known as "Depreciation Recapture," the deductions may come back to haunt you like the Ghost of Tax Years Past when you sell your home. *Boooooo*.

If you are renting your home, no worries. You haven't claimed depreciation and don't have to include any gain in your taxable income when you move. You can stop reading now and get back to writing your next bestseller.

If you own your home, here's what you need to know. The current tax law generally allows a single taxpayer to exclude up to \$250,000 of gain on the sale of the taxpayer's primary personal residence. Married taxpayers can exclude up to \$500,000 of gain. That's tax-free income! Unfortunately, however, if you were entitled to claim home office deductions, you have to report and pay tax on all or some of the gain. What's more, the reportable gain is taxed at ordinary income tax rates rather than the lower capital gain rates.

How much you report depends on whether the part of your home used for your business is within your house, such as an extra bedroom used exclusively as an office, or a separate part, such as an out-building or detached structure.

If your home office is located within your house, you must report gain on the sale of your house to the extent of the depreciation you were entitled to claim for periods after May 6, 1997. (Don't you just love it when the lawmakers pick random effective dates for the tax laws?) For example, let's say Ima Writer owns her home and has claimed depreciation of \$3,000 since May 6, 1997. She sells her home at a gain of \$20,000 and would otherwise be entitled to exclude the appreciation from her income. Ima must report \$3,000 of gain on her income tax return and will pay tax on the gain at her regular income tax rate.

If your home office is located in a separate structure, such as a converted shed or barn, and you used the separate structure in your business in the year of

sale, you must treat the sale of your home as the sale of two separate properties. The rules require you to allocate the sales price and the cost of your house between the business and personal portions for purposes of determining the amount of gain on the business part of the property. A detailed example can be found in IRS Publication 523 "Selling Your Home." If you do not use the separate home office in your business in the year of the sale, you do not have to treat the sale as the sale of two separate properties. You would compute your taxable gain as if the office you formerly used in your business was located within your main home, as in the example above.

Where you report the gain depends on whether you maintained your home office up to the time the home is sold. If part of your home is used as a home office until the time it is sold, report the gain on Form 4797 "Sales of Business Property." If you are no longer using part of your home as a home office at the time your home is sold, you'll report the gain on Schedule D "Capital Gains and Losses."

You can't avoid the depreciation recapture rule by electing not to claim depreciation deductions you are entitled to. If you were allowed to claim depreciation but didn't, the rule says you still recognize gain to the extent of the depreciation you could have validly claimed. On the bright side, even if you are forced to recapture depreciation, you've still achieved a financial benefit by deferring some tax until the year of sale.

The depreciation recapture rules apply not only to your home office, but also to your other business property, such as furniture and equipment, as well. However, given that used furniture, computers, and the like generally have no or very low resale value, it's unlikely you'll dispose of these types of property at a gain and you probably won't have to worry about this pesky depreciation recapture issue.

For more information, take a look at IRS Publication 523 "Selling Your Home" and IRS Publication 544 "Sales and Other Dispositions of Assets," as well as the Schedule D, Form 4797, and the related instructions.

**Got a tax issue? Email your question to
Author@BlarneyBabe.com.**

Diane O'Brien Kelly is a Certified Public Accountant, tax attorney, and humor writer from Texas. Visit her at BlarneyBabe.com.



Inquiring Minds Want to Know...

Given the company of writers who have dispensed their wisdom on

Ninlink over the years, I am fairly certain that I am not qualified to write an article on the business of writing and/or publishing books.

So this is about...poker.

I had an idea that people with expertise in various areas could write articles offering a condensed, but in depth, look at subjects that might help an author's current WIP or possibly spark an idea. *Cliff Notes* for research. Since it was my suggestion, I had to attempt the first column. I picked Texas Hold'em.

A little background regarding my expertise: I play weekly. I've played and won and played and lost in Atlantic City. In the grand scheme of the game, I'm probably up in my winnings but that can change at any time. Winning money at poker is about as predictable as earning money through writing. I've played cash games, tournaments, and sit-and-go's. I've read the books and watched a ridiculous amount of televised coverage. What does this mean? I'm an okay amateur player.

This article isn't intended to be a tutorial on how to play the game successfully. In case you were wondering I'm far less qualified to write a book about poker than I am an article about writing. It is simply an overview of the game, the vocabulary, and different styles of play that will hopefully offer anyone writing a poker scene some insight.

The Game

Two cards are dealt face down to each player. These are the hole cards. There is a small and big blind on each hand. Blinds rotate around the table and in tournament play will increase at set time intervals. The person to the left of the big blind opens the betting. A player can fold, call, or raise the big blind.

Once the betting is complete three cards are dealt face up. This is known as the *Flop*. For the players in the hand, the betting begins again. This time it is the person to the left of the dealer (or in the case where there is a professional dealer—the person with the

Texas Hold'em

BY STEPHANIE DOYLE

dealer "button") who opens the betting. This person can check (opt not to bet) or bet. If a bet is made, anyone who checked must call the bet to stay in the hand.

After the betting is complete, if more than one person is in the hand, a fourth card—the *Turn*—is dealt face up. Another round of checking/betting.

If more than one person remains, a fifth card—the *River* (or *Fifth Street*)—is dealt face up.

The winner is the player with the best five card hand of the total seven cards dealt.

There are variations of Texas Hold'em, but the most common is known as No-Limit. No limit means that at any given time a player can bet his entire stack of chips on a hand. This is—*all in*. This strategy can be employed successfully when a player with a large stack of chips wants to put pressure on his opponent to fold. Or more often it is used when a player has a low stack of chips and wants to double his stack in one hand.

The Sounds

In any poker environment where a game is being played, one sound dominates all others. No, it isn't the sound of players cursing as they lose money although there is that. It is the sound of chips being fondled. Chips can be shuffled and stacked. Single chips can dance across fingers. Good players will know tricks and will showcase them to let everyone know that they play a lot. The distinct sound of clicking will fill the room. Often when players are deep in thought, it will be the only sound heard.

Vocabulary

The language of poker is unique and very real. Players will speak in "poker" while playing. The more you play the more fluent you become. A great website, pokertips.org, provides an index of many terms. A few of my favorites:

Donkey: A player playing poorly. Making bad calls and bad decisions.

Fish: An amateur who can be taken advantage of. To paraphrase a line from the movie *Rounders* (a must see if you're writing about poker)—if you look around the table and you can't identify the fish—you're it.

Paint: Any face card.

Limp in: A player who just calls the big blind before the Flop. In some cases this can be a sign of ▶

weakness. In other cases a player might be “slow-playing” a big hand.

Big Slick: Ace, King. It is considered a very strong opening hand. Note that most opening hands have a moniker. Five, Nine = Dolly Parton. King, King = Cowboys. Eight, Eight = Snowmen. Five, Five = Presto. Two, Ten = Doyle Brunson, etc.

The Nuts: The best possible hand.

Trips: Three of a kind.

Outs: The number of cards in the deck that can come to give a player the winning hand.

Open ended vs. Gut shot: This relates to a straight. If a player has between the hole cards and dealt cards (typically after the Flop) a 4, 5, 6, 7 then either a 3 or an 8 will make the straight. Since there are more *outs* (4 3's in the deck, 4 8's in the deck for a total of 8 *outs*) this makes for a stronger betting hand than the *Gut Shot* or inside straight where the player has 4, 5, 7, 8 and only the 6 can come (4 *outs*) to make the straight.

On Tilt: A player is playing emotionally rather than with his head. Typically after losing a tough hand. This usually results in bad decision making.

Tells: A gesture, phrase, or some type of signal that a player unconsciously relays to the table letting the other players know the strength or weakness of his hand.

Strategy

The easiest way to win is to have good cards all the time. However, good players can win with *ATC*—any two cards. Volumes have been written on strategy. What I can offer is a quick overview on the different styles of play.

Aggressive players will bet and raise with great frequency, forcing other players to call or fold. They may have good cards, they may not. But because they are betting strongly—unless another player knows he has the nuts—it is difficult to call. This strategy can and often does win. However, an aggressive player can get caught in his trap if he pushes the betting against a better hand.

Tight players are conservative players. They play

the odds. They wait until they have the best starting hand and then they bet. The disadvantage to this is that they won't play many pots so winning money, especially in cash games, is more difficult. The benefits are obvious. Betting the odds increases a player's chances for winning a hand. The other plus is that a player can build a reputation as a tight player. When a tight player bets, the table always assumes strength. This gives a tight player a great opportunity to bluff.

Loose players like to play *ATC*. They will take chances, play unlikely starting hands, and hope to hit something on the Flop. The disadvantage is that in many cases the odds are against them. Their advantage, however, is that it is difficult for other players to put these players on a particular hand. This strategy can do well in cash games if a player starts to hit flops.

Ultimately, if you're writing about a poker player, know that a good player can adapt his game. More importantly he'll adapt to the other players. He will constantly “read” the table. He will remember what cards were played, how they were played, and betting tendencies. And he will search for tells. When entering a hand, he will often play the player and act on what he knows regardless of the two cards he is holding in his hand.

If you're writing about a truly skilled poker player, this person isn't just a brainy math wiz who can calculate odds. This person must also be a student of human nature who can interpret it correctly. Finally, a poker player is at heart a gambler.

Smart, student of human nature, takes risks...
hmm...sounds like another profession I know. Maybe I *can* write about writing.

Have an area of expertise you'd like to share with Ninc members? Contact Stephanie Doyle at stephd_romance@hotmail.com.

Stephanie Doyle is the author of several novels for Harlequin/Silhouette. She's currently at work on a continuity story for the Athena Force series due out in June of 2008.

Business Briefs

Hachette's Orbit Imprint Takes Off in September: The new science fiction and fantasy imprint from Hachette will produce at least 40 titles annually. Warner Aspect will gradually disappear with authors going to Warner's newly named Grand Central Publishing or to Orbit.

Mysterious Imprint: In September, New American Library will launch a new imprint—Obsidian Mysteries. It will cover all mysteries published under the eye of senior editor Kristen Weber.

Bookspan Helps Create Largest Direct-To-Consumer Market in U.S.: DirectGroup Bertelsmann has purchased partner Time Inc.'s 50% of Bookspan, dissolving the partnership begun in 2000. The 400 book clubs in Bookspan holdings include Doubleday Book Club, Literary Guild, and Book-of-the-Month Club. Though not disclosed, the cost of the buy-out is quoted at \$150 million. Bookspan will be absorbed into BMG Columbia House, already marketing music and DVDs direct in the U.S. and Canada. Bookspan currently has 8 million members with annual book club sales around \$700 million. Complete press release: tinyurl.com/2vfna3

A Farewell to Science Fiction

When I was asked if I'd like to write this piece, the suggestions for topics mostly seemed to be concerned with the fact that I've worked in several genres. The thing is, I don't do that anymore; now I only write fantasy novels, so I decided I'd use this opportunity to explain why.

One specific suggestion was that I might explain the difference between science fiction and fantasy. That's a very tricky question, but one that's been hugely important in my own career, so while it's not what I'm actually writing about, I'm going to start with it, just so you'll know what I'm talking about.

The short answer is that while everyone knows there's a difference, there is no agreed-upon distinction; every time someone's come up with what seems like a good definition, someone else has promptly pointed out works that don't fit. Generally, the consensus seems to be simply, "I know it when I see it." If it's got dragons and wizards, it's fantasy. If it's got robots and spaceships, it's science fiction. Books like Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonsdawn*, which has both dragons and spaceships, start arguments.

The fuzzy line means that as far as bookstores are concerned, it's all the same thing, and you shelve both fantasy and science fiction in the same section. Many readers, however, don't see it that way—they want one or the other, and not both. A lot of science fiction fans, in particular, only want to see science fiction. They consider it important because it deals with real possibilities about our future, while they see fantasy as silly, as it's largely concerned with impossible things like magic.

My father was like that. I grew up reading SF, rather than fantasy, partly because my father, a professor of chemistry, was a hard SF fan who considered fantasy a waste of time. My mother was omnivorous, and would happily read SF or fantasy or mystery or lots of other things, but she went along with Dad for the sake of peace in the family, so I grew up thinking of science fiction as the good stuff, the One True Genre. Mystery was a respectable neighbor, fantasy was an idiot cousin, horror was the exiled black sheep, romance was the airhead down the street, and Westerns the big dumb guy you didn't really want to talk to because he had nothing to say.

J.R.R. Tolkien got an exception, and was seen as a special case, not fantasy.

When I was in high school, though, I discovered Robert E. Howard, and Lord Dunsany, and other classic fantasy, and learned that some of my beloved SF-writing heroes—Fritz Leiber, L. Sprague de Camp, Michael Moorcock, and more—had had their flings in fan-

tasy. I also found Lin Carter's essays about fantasy. For me, this promoted fantasy, or at least sword-and-sorcery, from an idiot cousin to the cool guy your parents warned you to stay away from.

I started trying to write when I was eight, and of course, given my family history, I started out writing science fiction—my first story was about a super-intelligent laboratory mouse. I got my first professional rejection in 1972, my senior year of high school, and that same year I started selling nonfiction, writing features for the local paper.

By 1974 I was *seriously* trying to write, and not sticking to science fiction. In the year and a half I spent in Pittsburgh playing writer, I produced 26 short stories, and they were a mix of SF, fantasy, horror, mainstream, humor, and mystery, and I sent them off to markets as diverse as *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and *Redbook*. I wanted to be a writer, *any* kind of writer.

But I still saw SF as the top of the heap, and being an SF writer was my ultimate goal.

The first novel I sold, in 1979, was fantasy—but that wasn't because I was concentrating entirely on fantasy; I'd collected four rejections on an SF novel by that point, and was working on both a murder mystery and a Gothic romance. (I didn't realize yet just how dead Gothics were as a market.) The fantasy novel just happened to be the one that sold.

My second novel was also fantasy, because Lester del Rey, my editor, asked for a sequel.

My third, though, was science fiction, because I Wanted To Be An SF Writer. For a while in the 1980s I alternated SF and fantasy. I tried adding horror in 1990 with a novel called *The Nightmare People*, and for a long time I didn't entirely give up the idea of writing mystery or romance.

However, somewhere in the 1990s, a couple of things registered with me.

The big one was a major career issue, which I'll get to in a moment, but another was the realization that I like fantasy better than SF.

Admitting this to myself was difficult, because I really did have to overcome intense childhood conditioning. SF was rational and forward-thinking and progressive, while fantasy was silly reactionary nonsense, you see. Fantasy is lightweight fluff, while SF is important. That's what I grew up believing.

Except after 20 years in the business, I didn't believe that anymore. Not even close. Because I'd realized that most science fiction has no more connection with reality than most fantasy, and I enjoyed fantasy more. ▶

If I'm reading for fun, I'm far more likely to read fantasy than SF.

If I'm *writing* for fun, I'm far more likely to write fantasy than SF. I think fantasy has just as much to say about things I care about. Fantasy tends to be warmer, easier to read, easier to enjoy, with more emotional resonance, as far as I'm concerned. I was writing fantasy because I enjoyed it, and writing SF because I thought of myself as an SF writer—really, to some extent, to appease my father's ghost. Which would have appalled him, I think, as he always said he wanted his kids to live their own lives.

So I stopped writing SF.

That was the esthetic and personal reason I stopped. There were professional reasons, as well.

When I was alternating between SF at Avon and fantasy at Del Rey, I was happy doing it and expected to go on doing it indefinitely. I was blissfully ignoring changes in the publishing industry and the bookselling business. Those changes included computerization, which allowed booksellers and publishers to keep better track of what was selling, where, and how fast; the rise of the bookstore chains; the decline of the independent mass-market distributors; and the fantasy boom of the '80s.

When I sold my first novel, SF outsold fantasy by a good margin. By the mid-'80s they were dead-even. By 1990 fantasy was outselling SF by a good bit, and that gap has widened steadily ever since. Last I heard, fantasy sales were triple SF sales.

I was aware all along that *my* fantasy sold better than my SF—my best SF sales were on *The Cyborg and the Sorcerers*, at about 90,000 copies in domestic mass market, while in fantasy *The Misenchanted Sword* moved around 160,000 copies. I always figured this was because *Sword* had a great, eye-catching Darrell Sweet cover. And once my SF moved to Avon, well, everyone knew Del Rey had a better sales force and better marketing than Avon, at least in fantasy and SF, so of course my Avon titles didn't do as well.

What I had not realized was that this meant most casual bookstore browsers had labeled me a Del Rey fantasy author—in fact, at least once I heard someone call me a Darrell Sweet author, since Lester deliberately put Sweet covers on stories of a certain sort, and I was in that category. Most readers never saw my Avon titles. Most of my readers never even knew I wrote SF, and didn't look for it. I was getting typecast, pigeonholed, whatever you want to call it.

This didn't especially bother me, really. Even when I began getting lots more money for fantasy than for SF, it wasn't a big deal; writing SF was fun, and I didn't want to stop, I didn't want to get in a rut, so I settled for less money for every second novel. I was successful enough that I could afford to toss a book out there cheaply every so often.

But then the changes in bookselling caught up with me.

In 1991, my agent, Russ Galen, took my next pro-

ject, a proposal for a big fat novel called *The War Against the Dark*, to Del Rey. I wasn't alternating this time; this was a story that straddled the line between SF and fantasy. It had wizards and spaceships. We sent it to the SF editor at Del Rey entirely because he had a faster response time than the fantasy editor, not because we considered it one or the other.

That was when Del Rey informed us that the chains had been cutting their orders for Watt-Evans books, because my SF wasn't selling as well as my fantasy, and the bookstores didn't look to see whether it was SF or fantasy—all they looked at was net sales of my last couple of books. I had enough of a track record that they looked back more than one book, but even so, those science fiction novels I'd been writing were dragging down the average.

So if Del Rey was going to pay lots of money for a big fat book, they wanted something that they could label as "by the author of *The Misenchanted Sword*!" If we called *War Against the Dark* SF, then they wouldn't pay more than two-thirds what I was then getting for my fantasy novels, and they weren't sure about even paying that much. (It took them a weirdly long time to figure out that *War* could be marketed as fantasy; I really wonder about that sometimes.)

That negotiation got weird and complicated, and *War Against the Dark* wound up as a trilogy and was a commercial disaster. I left Del Rey over that and certain other problems, but it also finally drove Russ to teach me the facts of life, and me to realize that things had changed and I couldn't just go on writing whatever I pleased and rely on selling it for big money. I was seen by publishers as a writer whose career was on the decline, and I couldn't afford to screw around or take any stupid risks—I needed to write good commercial stuff to reverse the trend, and given my history and reputation and the state of the market, where big fat fantasy was booming and SF was in decline, that meant I had to write big fat fantasies.

So I did, once I got free of Del Rey and went to Tor, and when I did I realized finally, as I said a few paragraphs back, that I didn't actually *want* to write science fiction anymore. I'd finally gotten over my father's biases.

And I'd also lost interest in horror. Fantasy was good enough for me.

My career's stable again, and everything's going pretty well, but I've accepted the label and the niche; I'm a fantasy writer, and the Watt-Evans name is a fantasy brand, and it's going to stay one. Coca-Cola doesn't label their water "Coke Water," they call it Dasani, because "Coke" means cola to beverage consumers. Watt-Evans means fantasy to book consumers.

This doesn't mean I won't ever write SF again, just that I won't put the Watt-Evans name on it; if I decide I really *must* write an SF novel, and can afford the pay cut, I'll write it under another name.

But I'm not in any hurry. Fantasy novels are how I make my living now, and anything else is a sideline. ▲

Young Adult Market Thrives

BY CECELIA GOODNOW

What a difference a decade makes.

Back in the 1990s, critics said the young adult novel was dead—done in by chain-store peddlers of pulp series and horror schlock, who had elbowed aside librarians and editors as arbiters of taste. With lists skewing toward ages 11 to 14, older teens were all but forgotten—a virtual “endangered species,” as *Booklist* critic and literary historian Michael Cart put it.

Remind him of that today, and Cart laughs softly.

“That was then and this is now,” he says.

Not only has young adult literature made a miraculous recovery, the field is positively glowing as strong writing and strong sales make this one of the most vibrant periods in the history of the field.

“Kids are buying books in quantities we’ve never seen before,” Cart said. “And publishers are courting young adults in ways we haven’t seen since the 1940s.”

According to a Fordham University analysis, teen book sales rose by nearly a quarter between 1999 and 2005.

There are many reasons for the turnaround, not least of which is the sheer size of the teen population—over 30 million kids with ready cash in their pockets. Called Gen Y or Millennials, they trail only the baby boomers in number.

“The publishing world has recognized that teens have a lot of disposable income, and they’re willing to spend it,” said Judy Nelson of Pierce County, WA, who is president of the national Young Adult Library Services Association.

Teens not only buy books, they visit the library. In the King County, WA, Library System, teen fiction now circulates at a higher rate than adult fiction. Call it a case of Harry Potter afterglow as the pre-teen Muggles of yesteryear carry their newfound reading habit into later adolescence.

Perhaps most heartening is the quality of the writing that’s emerging. Older teens in particular are enjoying a surge of sophisticated fare as the young adult field becomes a global phenomenon. All

of which leads Cart to declare, “We are right smack-dab in the new golden age of young adult literature.”

Fantasy remains one of the most popular genres, but graphic novels are becoming major players as well, with a huge teen fan base and newfound literary respect. *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luan Yung was a National Book Award finalist and in January became the first graphic novel to win the Printz Award.

Adventure, romance, humor, and gritty coming-of-age tales are perennial favorites with young readers. In addition, racy series such as *The Gossip Girls*—often likened to a teen *Sex and the City*—have created a buzz. Teens enjoy their beach reads like the rest of us.

More notably, though, there’s a new strain of sophistication and literary heft as publishers cater to the older end of the spectrum with books that straddle teen and adult markets. Holly Koelling, a librarian in King County, WA, has been tracking these trends as she writes an upcoming edition of *Best Books for Young Adults*, an American Library Association reference book.

“There has been an increase in the age of the protagonist, the complexity of the plotting, and the content—the gravity of the content,” Koelling said. “I think it may be a reflection of a more sophisticated teenage population.”

Teen readers agree.

“Chick lit and a lot of the ‘teen books’ out there are great for vacation or a quick read,” said Jennifer Schmidt, 15, who’s in the Teen Advisory Group at the Shoreline, WA, library, “but I think there are a lot of teens out there who like reading stuff that’s a little deeper.”

The bestseller lists reflect that. A prime example is *The Book Thief*, a Holocaust tale narrated by Death and written with stunning beauty by a young Aussie author, Markus Zusak. First published in Australia as an adult title, it has been on the *New York Times* children’s bestseller list for roughly a year and, as of the April 8 list, was holding strong at No. 4

In late winter Ellen Hopkins made the list with *Impulse*, her tale of three suicidal teens who ▶

meet at a psychiatric hospital. Like her meth-addiction novel, *Crank*, it's written in a challenging format—free-verse poetry.

Then there's *Octavian Nothing: Traitor to the Nation*, the 2006 National Book Award winner for Young People's Literature. Set in Revolutionary War-era Boston, it's a searing, audacious tale of racial experimentation that the author describes as part of "a 900-page, two-volume historical epic for teens, written in a kind of unintelligible 18th-century Johnsonian-Augustan prose."

Obviously, teen lit is fast outgrowing its bobby socks.

"It's not just 'Sweet Valley High' right now," said Seattle librarian Hayden Bass. "The quality has been pushed way up."

As for which came first—the surge in quality or the receptive audience—no one is entirely sure.

"It's both at once," said Nancy Hinkel, publishing director at Knopf Books for Young Readers. She likens the phenomenon to a "snake that's swallowing its tail."

The staying power of books is especially heartening given the lure of YouTube, MySpace, and other techie diversions. Shrewdly, publishers are meeting

kids on their high-tech turf.

Noting that the Web has been used to "hype, announce, and promote books," Leslie Cornaby, a Seattle-area 10th-grader, said, "I don't have to go to my school's library anymore to find out what the latest books are, and I can also get a book on audio and put it on my iPod if I really want to."

The most avid teen readers, meanwhile, have become astute critics and are shaping library collections—and indirectly, publishing trends—through teen advisory groups. At the ALA's midwinter meeting in Seattle, about 40 teens showed up to critique candidates for the Best Books for Young Adults list.

Their comments wowed Angelina Benedetti, a King County libraries manager and Printz Award panelist. She said later she was shocked the teens talked more about *Octavian Nothing* than stereotypical chick lit.

"They finally have something to challenge them," she said. "It is really a golden age."

Cecelia Goodnow is a reporter at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, where she covers children's books, consumer issues, and lifestyle trends.

Conference Recap: The Future of Publishing

SUMMARIZED BY PATI NAGLE

"The Future of Publishing" was a lively conversation among industry pros Chris Anderson (*Wired*), Betsy Mitchell (Del Rey), Denise Little (Tekno Books), and Ken Sherman (agent). The panelists agreed that the Internet will continue to be a major influence, from the influx of young people who understand Internet marketing now coming into publishing houses, to innovations like group blogs and potential pay-per-view type downloads of books. Anderson said one fundamental change is the direct contact between writers and their readers via the Internet. Author self-promotion is a continuing trend, and the Internet can help authors pinpoint niche audiences.

Emerging alternative formats for fiction include e-readers, audiobooks, and new fiction lengths (such as the return of the novella). A "snack" culture of small products consumed in small amounts of time is growing. Mitchell pointed out that trilogies of romances—shorter books with

cliffhangers—are doing well and may carry over into romantic fantasy.

Another new format is the reissue of books by name authors (Laurel K. Hamilton, George R. R. Martin) as graphic novels. There's a new audience of young women who have discovered "comics" via manga. These younger readers of comics will grow up to become novel readers.

Concerns about publishing's future include piracy, which may be made easier by the shift to electronic formats. Little's view is that if the quality is good enough, people will buy the real thing rather than an inferior pirated product. She also thinks the trend of publishing only "bestsellers" is a short-term problem that technology will render insignificant.

Other trends:

- ▶ Ads may be put into novels again.
- ▶ Product placement is coming into things like cover art.
- ▶ Little thinks the next thematic trend is spirituality.
- ▶ Mitchell suggests YA as a way to catch young readers.

The Inside Scoop On the Bonus

BY SARA MEGIBOW

Imagine your excitement if, straight out of your wildest dreams, your book hits the number three spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list. You'd probably buy a hundred copies of the newspaper just so you could cut out the list and tape it to every surface of your home. But if you also have a bonus clause in your contract, you might be celebrating another kind of victory—one with dollar signs attached—because you'll be heading to the bank to deposit the bonus advance against your royalties!

What is a bonus clause? What kinds are there, how can they be used to your advantage, and how do you get one in your contract? These are common questions, so I'll dive right in with some good insider tips and hope to illuminate the situation that every author hopes to be in by triggering a bonus clause.

What is a bonus clause?

Basically, a bonus clause states that if an author's book hits some pre-specified milestone as outlined in the contract, the publisher will pay the author an additional advance against royalties.

What kinds are there?

There are numerous types of bonuses—too many to outline all of them here, but I'll highlight the most common ones.

1. The Bestseller trigger. When a work hits a certain position on a specified bestseller list (i.e. *NYT*, *USA Today*, *Publishers Weekly*, B&N etc.), an added advance will be paid. For example, a bonus clause could say (remember, these are fabricated examples), "...author will receive \$5,000 per week, up to \$25,000, for any spot between 1 and 10 on the *New York Times* Bestseller List." or "...author will receive \$2,500 per week for any spot between 1 and 5 on the B&N Children's Bestseller list, and \$1000 per week for any spot between 6 and 10...to X number of dollars."

Bestseller triggers almost always involve a cap to a certain dollar amount.

2. The Milestone trigger. Publishers might pay

bonuses if a book wins a children's award such as the Newbery, Caldecott, or Printz, is released as a movie, or is released in hard cover (instead of original trade paperback).

3. The Sales Trigger. There are sales bonuses that go into effect if the book's net sales exceed some pre-arranged number. For example, a net sales bonus clause could say, "...author will receive a bonus of \$5,000 if the book's net sales hit 25,000 in 12 months, and will receive an additional bonus of \$10,000 if the book's net sales hit 50,000 in 12 months."

Another common performance bonus would be one that pays the author if a certain number of copies are shipped within one year (as opposed to the net sales of the book).

When and how can bonus clauses be used to your advantage?

Of course, a publisher won't pay any of these bonuses if the bonus clause is not written in the author's contract. So, when and how can bonus clauses be used to your advantage? As an agent, here is how we like to negotiate bonus clauses, and if you are acting as your own agent, these hints pertain to you, too.

Once a publisher has offered to buy a book, there is a back-and-forth time to negotiate what agents call "the deal points," which include the major terms of the contract (such as rights granted, advance, royalty percentages, payout, option, etc.). The deal point discussion also includes the bonus clauses. So why should you include them?

A bonus clause can be a good way to sweeten the deal. For example (and again, these are fabricated numbers), let's say the publisher wants to pay \$10,000 for a book and no matter how many times the parties go back-and-forth, the editor refuses to budge on the advance. That might be a good time to say, "Okay, we'll take the \$10K, but we want a \$5,000 bonus if we ship 35,000 books in 12 months."

Or, let's say two offers are on the table from two reputable publishing houses. If all other factors are similar, a bonus clause may tip the scales in ▶

favor of one house over the other. Again, it could be a case of two houses matching upfront money and matching royalties, but one house promising additional advances against royalties if the book is made into hard cover, or if net sales exceed some number, or if the book hits a bestseller list, or if the book wins an award. It can show that the publisher has more enthusiasm, because it was willing to go the extra distance with a bonus.

Bonuses sound great, right? But here's the downside and the reason not every author wants one: Some authors consider bonuses to be ghost money. To them, getting \$12,500 up front and no bonus clause is better than getting \$10,000 up front and hoping to hit their milestone in order to earn an extra \$2500 (or more). Negotiating a contract is always difficult, but cash money on the table is a real and controllable factor. An insider secret is that the milestones many publishers set on their bonus clauses tend to be very difficult to achieve. The likelihood of hitting a bonus milestone could be low. For example, of all the adult hardcover books published by the Berkley imprint in 2006, only four hit the *Publisher's Weekly* bestseller list for even one week (January 8, 2007 *Publisher's Weekly* cover story). Whether or not to negotiate in a bonus clause is a decision to be made by an agent (or you, or a lawyer), when all the other factors are on the table.

The second insider tip deals with semantics in the contract. When that contract is written, we find it useful to state that the bonus shall be paid within a set number of days (i.e. 30 days) of hitting the milestone (whether it is shipping, sales, an award, etc.) This is called a Flow-Through Clause. Publishers would like to hold that money until the next royalty payment cycle if it is not stated clearly in the contract, and we prefer to look out for an author's

best interest by ensuring the money is paid more promptly.

So, if you go for a bonus clause and successfully get one (or more) in your contract, only two things are left to do. First, hit that milestone! Second, congratulate yourself all the way to the bank!

Sara Megibow is a literary assistant at the Nelson Literary Agency, nelsonagency.com.

Writers' Support Group for Novelists, Inc. Members Only

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NINK a publication of Novelists, Inc.

An Organization for Writers of Popular Fiction
P.O. Box 2037
Manhattan KS 66505

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