

NINK

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Inside Online Book Reviews: Do They Matter?

BY MONICA VALENTINELLI

Book reviews. Every author simultaneously dreads and hopes for them. But do they matter?

Prior to the Internet's popularity, your potential readers might have come across your book review through various forms of print media. Whether they picked up a magazine or a newspaper, chances are they stumbled across either a picture of your book or a mention of it in the review section. In other words, a reader might have expected to see book reviews in the "reviews section," but they may not have known beforehand which books were going to be featured. Since that book review was published on a particular date, readers could then only re-access that review if they either referenced it through a magazine or newspaper archive or found it lying around in a dentist's office somewhere.

With the Internet, readers are not directed to websites with dated book review content nor do they have to pay for that information. Now they can utilize the Internet at any time and search for a specific book title with the word "review" after it to read an opinion. That book review could have been written professionally or unprofessionally; it also could be a positive or a negative review. What's more, there is no expiration date on these reviews as there is with print media. It is not uncommon for content to be "read" online months (if not years) after that article or post was originally published.

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This phenomenon is part and parcel to something called "natural search." Simply, it's a candid description to explain what happens when your readers type something into Google and read about you or your book. Studies have shown that the first page of the search results influences what link a searcher will click on. Typically, the websites that are optimized through something called "search engine optimization" will rank higher than a website that is not. Although there are other factors

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Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

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Address changes may be made on the
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For members without Internet access,
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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. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

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New Members:

Laura Hayden, Montgomery AL
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Ninc has room to grow...

Recommend membership to *your* colleagues.
Prospective members may apply online at
<http://www.Ninc.com>.

Refer members at Ninc.com. Go to Members Only,
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Ninc Statement of Principle.

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

Who Are We?

BY KASEY MICHAELS
2009 NINC PRESIDENT

The Completely Unofficial and Unscientific Ninc Member Survey totals are up on the website. Lots of it are on Excel, and members can download all of it at <http://www.ninc.com>. If you haven't gotten around to doing that yet, or don't have Excel capability, here's some interesting results (in no particular order):

Two hundred and seventy-one members responded to the Survey. Some of these didn't answer all the questions ... why, I don't know. But like I said — it's an unscientific survey.

It looks like at least two of us have been playing this publishing game thing since 1976. There ought to be a medal for that, or maybe a sympathy card; in this business, that probably depends what day it is, right?

The earliest any reporting member wrote for an e-pub house is 1996, and now 23% of our reporting members have written for e-pub houses. Since 1992, over 16% have written for a small press.

The number of book-length fiction works published in traditional print format ranges from two to 108 (Good Lord, that second one's me, although I'm betting there are non-reporting members who have that number beat — and we all ought to be out seeking professional help...).

Sixty-three reporting members are currently searching for an agent and would like Ninc's help in getting them more information on that subject. Will do, and we're already working on that. Forty-three members don't have and do not want an agent (and if Laura Resnick filled out the survey, we know who at least one of those 43 is, don't we?).

Ninety-three-point-five percent of us published first in traditional print format, but 17 cut their publishing teeth elsewhere before joining Ninc.

Eighty percent of reporting members are currently published in traditional print format. Those formats include Fantasy/SF, Horror, Mainstream, Mystery, Suspense/Thriller, Western, Women's Fiction, Romance, Erotic Romance, Young Adult, Children's Fiction, Erotica, Christian/Inspirational, Media Tie-in, and "others." Those others are: Paranormal, English regional saga, YA work-for-hire, historical novels, non-fiction, urban fantasy, romantic suspense, and relationship books. Whew! I don't think we missed a genre. That's why we're Ninc, and not anybody else. We're ... well, we're everybody.

Sobering is that nearly 13% of those no longer published in book-length fiction with a traditional print house are no longer actively seeking to do so. What we didn't ask, but should have, was "what are you doing instead?" Since we didn't, speculating is just that, speculating. So we won't.



Where e-books are concerned, Romance, in all its many forms, definitely leads the list, but there's some Fantasy/SF, and enough YA, Christian/Inspirational and Mystery in there to show that Romance is not *all* e-publishers put out there. That breakdown is fairly similar with small presses.

More than half of those responding would consider writing for an e-book publisher, while nearly half would not consider this, for varied reasons. Most of them, as with many decisions a writer faces, come down to m-o-n-e-y. Like we needed a survey to tell us that, right? More responders, 70%, would consider writing for a small press publisher, with those who responded in the negative pretty much spelling out the same \$ word. Writers need to eat. Who knew?

We're beginning to place some of our print backlist with e-publishers and small presses.

Traditional print responders all have kept their entire advance, not been asked to return any of it to go toward marketing or for any other reason. And most received royalties of at least \$2000 after one year. Mass market royalty rates ranged (initial rate only) from four percent to 12%. Trade paper royalties from "not enough" to seven percent, to 18%. Even hardbacks had a range, from five percent to mostly ten percent, to one eye-popping 20%.

Most of us publish one traditional print book per year, but we've got over-achievers with as many as five, and the publishers ran from Avon to Zebra, and almost every letter of the alphabet in between. Print runs? All over the board, from 500 to 1000, and all the way up to more than 100,000 copies in an initial print run. Many of these traditional print houses publish the books in e-version as well.

The results with e-books were a little different, with many reporting no advances (75%), or advances that might have to be partially returned. Many e-publishers do not pay advances because the books are made available for sale within a few months of acceptance. Nearly 32% of those responding earned less than \$500 in royalties after one year, with 27% seeing more than \$2000 in royalties in that same time span. Royalty rates range from 30-45%. Many authors see their work also published in paper, mostly as POD or in limited runs.

Small presses also aren't known for huge advances or print runs, and that is reflected in the answers given by those taking the survey.

Now to get to a "big" question: If you were applying to join Ninc today, would you still be eligible under the existing qualifications for membership? The answer is Yes, for 80%, and No for nearly 20% of us. That's not great news – no matter how you slice it.

What is great news is that once a Ninc member, always a Ninc member. Through good times and bad, selling or looking, as long as a Ninc member pays his/her dues, he/she is a member. And, if times get really tough, Ninc has its Benevolent Fund – where nobody asks any questions, and any member can apply for use of the Fund for dues.

The reasons for not being eligible if applying today pretty much break down to "Because I haven't been published in any form in the past five years" (62.5%) and "Because I write book-length fiction e-books and/or small press books now, and my contracts with these houses don't meet the current qualifications" (37.5%).

And then we turn the page and get to the last question, and find that, of those filling out the survey, eighty-nine-point-something would like to see membership qualifications kept as they are now or, if the survey results indicate a significant number of our fellow members have moved beyond the existing P&PM criteria, revisited to possibly amend this criteria in order to more accurately reflect today's Ninc members. Ten

percent had no opinion – hard to find a Nincer with No Opinion, but there you go...

Then, being writers, and knowing writers love to write, we left a space for comments. Man, did we get comments. Go to <http://www.ninc.com>, click on the hotlink on the right side of the Member Home page, download the “Ninc Survey Open Ended Question Responses,” and scroll to Question 61.

For now, here are a few of them:

I'm VERY grateful to be grandfathered into NINC, because I do hope to be able to revive my career, and it will be a lot harder without NINC behind me.

NINC should strive to meet the needs of novelists in today's publishing environment, which includes many non-traditional business models, and not be locked into criteria set down in a different era. If NINC fails to adapt to changing technology and economic imperatives of publishing, the organization risks becoming irrelevant and authors will migrate to a more forward-thinking group. We should ALWAYS be reexamining our assumptions and making necessary changes to keep apace of changes in the industry. Not acting in haste, or without due deliberation, but recognizing that adapt or die is the imperative for <every> organization and business in this information age.

Even though I haven't been published in a while, NINC has been my lifeline. If I didn't have my membership, I'd probably pack it in. So never make membership contingent on current publication.

At a minimum, the P&PM language should be changed so that an author is not denied membership because of what his or her publisher does, or doesn't do, for OTHER authors. It's ludicrous to punish the individual for actions taken, or not taken, by a corporation over which he or she has no control.

It would be nice if I could find a market for my work with the big houses, but despite my agent's best efforts, it hasn't happened. I'm glad to have a smaller house to publish my books, and both a smaller house and an e-publisher to reprint them. I'm also glad to have a spouse, with a good health-care plan, to support me

I love Ninc. It keeps me sane. (or saner)

Times change. Reading habits change. Aside from the multipublished criterion (which seems justly to be set in stone), I don't think anything should be too rigid. I certainly do not think reconsiderations should be too frequent, but perhaps at five yearly intervals or so criteria, other than the multipublished rule, could be reviewed.

The issues and problems for small press and e-pubs are vastly different from those of traditional published authors. I don't advocate exclusion, but just as unpublished and published authors have different needs, I think format differences must be recognized and addressed.

I'm trying to find a new traditional publisher, something I've pursued continuously since my previous line closed nearly five years ago. It's a tough market, but I'll make it eventually. In the meantime, I'm doing e-books for no advance (though I make a couple thousand a year or more total from the 28 old and new titles currently available in e-format). I value my NINC membership and hope nothing happens to deny me access to this organization.

Stay as sweet as you are, Ninc

Count on it ▲

Inside Online Book Reviews

Continued from page 1 ▶ involved in how links rank in a search engine results page, it's possible that a reader's review of your book on Sue's blog might rank higher than your own website.

Through enhanced web analytics, websites (and online retailers) can see whether or not large online publicity campaigns that drive a lot of traffic might affect your overall book sales. It is much more difficult to see what is known in search as the "long tail." This phrase is used to describe the visits that are scattered on hundreds of websites over a given period of time. In other words, your "long tail" would be not only the book review on Sue's blog that got ten reads, but the sum of hundreds of other website reviews or pages that get similar traffic.

By their nature, book reviews affect the buying cycle differently than an online publicity campaign. Online publicity campaigns are structured and may be measured provided you (or your publisher) control that content and can measure it. With the way web analytics functions, it's challenging to get data about content that's hosted on a website that you do not own, so it's hard to measure individual impact. Even though you might not know for certain how these reviews affect your sales, they certainly have a different impact on the buying cycle than a fully developed media campaign.

While the jury may still be out on whether or not online publicity and reviews drive book sales online, the fact that content lives "forever" online also effects the buying cycle for your book. Say a reader clicked on a top-ranking review of your book. After enjoying your book review on Sue's blog, a reader may want to buy it. If that review doesn't have a link to your website or an online retailer, the reader might either a) go back to a search engine and try to find your book or visit Amazon.com, etc. or b) go to their local bookstore or library and read the book offline. If the review does link back to your website or an online retailer, then a reader's buying decision might be affected by a few things, including ease of website use, price and other ratings. Now say that reader wants to buy your book but has to wait a week or two, forgets about it, or heard more good things about it at a different point in time. The reader can either a) bookmark a review or website to remind herself to make a purchase or b) search for your book at another time and start the process all over again.

Even though the buying cycle for a book was not instantaneous prior to the Internet, the buying cycle in today's world has changed because of the information available online and the way readers access it. Price is just one piece of information that's more readily accessible. Instead of driving to multiple bookstores to see the price of one book, readers can now view prices for both new *and* used books in several places online without being influenced by a salesperson.

For any business that offers a website and a brick-and-mortar store, there is some degree of crossover between the two because your readers don't live in a vacuum. Some may only shop for books offline, some only online, and some may hear about something online (or off) and buy wherever that book is accessible. Studies on <http://www.Internetretailer.com> and <http://www.marketingsherpa.com/#> have shown that online reviews may greatly influence a buyer's shopping decision, second only to word-of-mouth advertising.

When it comes to online book reviews, whether or not a reader writes a decent review of the book may also be a factor as to whether or not someone will be influenced to purchase your title. If the book review is filled with typos or Internet slang, chances are a reader might not take that review seriously. If the book review is well structured, like some of those you might find on a niche (genre) site such as <http://www.flamesrising.com> or a popular website like <http://www.publishersweekly.com>, then you might want to pay closer attention to what is being said. How do you do that?

First, set up a Google Alert for your book title if you haven't already done so. Simply go to <http://www.google.com/alerts>, and enter your book title, wrapped in quotation marks. If your book title has an alternate title or additional words that readers might drop off, you might want to consider altering your alert. Next, establish some criteria for how you might handle book reviews. My criteria is three-fold: Does the website my review is hosted on receive enough traffic? Does the book review rank in Google, Yahoo!, Bing or Ask? Is that review distributed through social media like Shelfari and Goodreads or Facebook? Keep in mind that a Google Alert will let you know when Google indexes that mention of your book, but it will not tell you where it ranks on that search engine page. You might want to search for your book title and the word "review" on occasion, to see what ranks in the search engines.

What should you do if you get a bad review? While that decision is entirely up to you, you might want to consider crafting what's known as a "search engine-friendly" page on your own website or blog to offer coverage for your good reviews. The title of your page should be simple and to the point. [Book Title] Review: Written by [Your Name] is an example of a structure you might want to use. I recommend writing one-to-two paragraphs of text on the page before linking to the good reviews of your book. When you link to them, make sure that the text inside of the link's brackets offers the correct title. Here's a sample format: [Book Title] Review on [Website]. Search engines read the text within the brackets, weigh its semantic importance, and may also take into consideration where that link is placed.

By creating a static page on your website that is structured in a readable and search engine-friendly way, you're shaping the possibility of where readers land when they're looking for reviews of your book. While you may (or may not) influence their decision on whether or not they'll buy the book from you, addressing online book reviews in a professional, positive manner may also help your overall image for the long-term. Remember, everything you do online leaves a digital footprint for years to come. By planning where you'll take your next steps, you might help your readers find a clearer path to your positive reviews rather than leaving their searches to chance.

Monica Valentinelli is a horror and dark fantasy author and game designer who just released a short story in the anthology Buried Tales of Pinebox, Texas. She's also the Project Manager for the horror website <http://www.flamesrising.com> and the Content and Web Analytics Manager for the sheet music retailer <http://www.musicnotes.com>. For more about Monica, visit her website at <http://www.mlvwrites.com>.

Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

In Digital Reader News . . .

Barnes & Noble will work with IREX Technologies (Netherlands) to provide a reader that will access 700,000 ebook titles on B&N's eBookstore site. The reader will have an 8.1" stylus touch screen with 3G connectivity and it will be available by the end of the year. IREX has readers on the market already, including the iLiad book that sells for \$699. Currently there is no price for the B&N reader.

Sony Daily Edition is the latest model of reader, retailing at \$399, in time for Christmas. The new model can be read as a 7" paperback when vertical and when horizontal has a two-page magazine/newspaper view. Customers will have access to Overdrive collections through their local libraries. This joins the Sony family that includes the 6" touch screen Sony Touch, \$299, and the 5" screen Sony Pocket, \$199.

New Agent

Stacia Decker left Harcourt and Otto Penzler Books for the Donald Maas Literary Agency. She will be focusing on mystery, suspense, noir, and crime fiction.

Forensic Files

By D. P. Lyle, MD



The Myth Of the Untraceable Poison

One of the most common questions I get from writers is: Is there a poison that can't be found in a corpse? The answer is No. And Yes.

Much depends on the state of the corpse when it is found. If severely decayed or completely skeletonized, the ME and the forensic toxicologist have their hands tied. Mostly. There are some toxins, such as the heavy metals (Mercury, Lead, and Arsenic are common ones), that can be found in bones and hair. But most toxins can't be found in corpses that are severely decayed or simply bones.

In a more or less intact body, your villain can still get away with the murder by poison. That is, until your clever sleuth figures out that something is amiss and solves the crime.

The first thing your murderer must consider is how to make the poisoning look like something else. An example would be an elderly person with heart and lung disease who dies in his sleep. In this case, the person's private physician would sign the death certificate as a natural cardiac death and then almost always the ME will accept it. Why? Because there is an old adage in medicine that says: Common things occur commonly. Most people who die in this situation do indeed die from natural causes, so searching for something more sinister would be neither logical nor practical. If the ME accepted the private physician's cause of death, no autopsy would be done and no toxicological examinations would be undertaken. An overdose of Morphine or digitalis or arsenic or anything else would go undetected.

Unless someone asked questions. Maybe a high-dollar inheritance or insurance policy is in play. If an inheritance, one family member could suspect another and ask questions. In the case of a large insurance policy, the insurance company would look under every stone before paying off the policy. Or your sleuth could have some reason to suspect that things are not as they seem. In any of these situations, the ME might be moved to open a file and investigate.

But if your killer is clever, he might be able to keep the ME completely out of the picture or at least give him an easy answer for the cause of death. If no murder is suspected, he'll take the path of least resistance, which is also the cheapest route. Remember, he must live with and justify his budget annually. If he is wasteful he'll be looking for a job. So, give him a cheap and easy out. Your sleuth will then have to battle the ME to get the case re-opened.

The second thing a clever poisoner can do is to use a poison that is not readily detectable and will slip through most drug screens. Toxicology testing follows a two-tiered approach. Screening Tests, which are easier, faster, and cheaper, are used to identify common classes of drugs such as narcotics or amphetamines. This only tells the ME and toxicologist that some type of narcotic or amphetamine is present, but not which one. Determining which one requires more sophisticated, time-consuming, and expensive Confirmatory Testing. And if the screening tests are normal, no further testing is warranted and the ME would not spend the time and money to go further down that road.

Drug screens typically test for alcohol, narcotics, sedatives, marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, and aspi-

rin. Some screen for a few other classes. Once a member of a class is identified, then confirmatory testing will determine exactly which member of the class is present and in what amount. For example, if narcotic is found in the screen, further testing might show that the actual narcotic present is morphine. Or an amphetamine might be further analyzed and this might show that methamphetamine is the culprit.

Your poisoner could use a poison that would not be found in the typical screen. Things such as arsenic, selenium, and most plants (oleander, deadly nightshade, etc.) do not show up on the typical tox screen, and when the screen came back negative, the ME might not go further. Why would he spend the time and money without a good reason? This is where your sleuth steps in to shake things up.

But, if a poison is suspected and if the funds and interest to pursue it are present, anything can be found in an intact corpse. Using gas chromatography in conjunction with either mass spectrometry (GS/MS) or infrared spectroscopy (GC/IR) will give a chemical fingerprint for any molecule. And since each molecule has its own structure and thus its own fingerprint, every compound can be distinguished from every other one.

To write a good mystery that will keep the reader guessing to the end, you must plot the nearly perfect murder. This way when your sleuth cracks the case, he or she will be a true hero. If poisoning is your killer's chosen weapon, then use the above principles to make your plot as clever and convoluted as possible. Have your killer mask the death as natural or use some poison that is not readily detectable in screening tests, and then your sleuth must be very clever to solve the case.

There are several sources for you to search out poisons and to discover how they act and how they are identified. Google, of course; and try plugging into your state poison control center. My books, *Forensics for Dummies*, *Murder and Mayhem*, and *Forensics and Fiction* cover a number of poisons. I also recommend *Howdunnit: Book of Poisons* by Serita Stevens and Anne Bannon from Writers' Digest Books. It is a great resource for poisons of all types.

D. P. Lyle, MD
The Writers Medical and Forensics Lab
<http://www.dplylemd.com>

Business Briefs

Access the latest Google Settlement Issue

In the last days before objections and comments could be filed, the Urban Libraries Council weighed in on a question of broadening access. The proposed settlement listed a single terminal in public libraries. They want a "free public access service" that could be provided by libraries through their own electronic services. Another service not included in the original is a subscription model. There is also a movement for confidentiality of user access on Google Book Search. This new development may slow down the implementation of services more than publisher requests.

Microsoft and Yahoo have filed new objections, although Computer & Communications Industry Associates are supporters. Copyright doesn't seem to be the issue, but partnerships seem to be appearing that aren't covered in the settlement.

Salinger Continues in Court

A panel of judges is now considering an appeal on *60 Years Later: Coming Through the Rye*, following an injunction in July. Salinger's legal counsel stipulated that her client doesn't want a sequel or derivative of the classic *Catcher in the Rye*, although the new book is in print in the UK. So far, none of the judges has had good things to say about the book's literary merit. The original ruling stated there was too much infringement; the appeal must look to see if fair use can be cited or if they concur that too much material came from the original literary icon. Salinger has never authorized any derivative work, including film rights.

20 Simple Ways to Drive Massive Traffic to Your Web Site

BY PENNY SANSEVIERI

Embarking on an Internet marketing campaign doesn't have to be difficult, tricky, or complicated. Here are a few simple tips (twenty in fact) that you can easily implement to get tons of traffic to your site right now!

1) **Write articles:** believe it or not this is an incredible tool for driving traffic. Writing good, well-written, relevant articles can net you quite a bit of activity to your web site. Don't forget to add your URL in your byline. Articles should be 500 to 2,000 words in length. You can send articles to sites like: articlecity.com, goarticles.com, submityourarticles.com and ezinearticles.com.

2) **Social bookmark *everything*** — and I do mean everything. You can bookmark each page of your site and each blog entry you post. While this might seem tedious it's worth it. You'll see a strong increase in traffic if you social bookmark each page on your site and each of your blog entries.

3) **List yourself in the best directories** — you'll have to pay for this but since most people don't do this (since everyone's looking for a freebie) you could really enhance your traffic by getting a listing: <http://dir.yahoo.com>, www.business.org, botw.org.

4) **Get yourself listed at:** <http://DMOZ.org> — it's not easy to get listed there but worth the effort.

5) **Review:** if you can review hot new products or books within your market, head on over to Amazon.com and start positioning yourself as an expert. In order to do this effectively you'll want to create an Amazon profile and make sure and sign each review with a reference to your URL (your web site). You can also go to epinions.com and revo.com to review products as well.

6) **Offer a freebie on Craig's List:** you'll be amazed at how much traffic you get from a single Craig's List ad. The key here is to send people to a page on your site and make sure they have to sign up for something (like your email newsletter) before they can grab their freebie. That way you're not just getting traffic, you're also building your list.

7) **Create a "recommended by" list** on your Del.icio.us page — you can do this by logging on and creating an account at del.icio.us and then tagging articles, blogs and other content you think is important to your readership. Then offer this page as a resource site. You can add a link to this page in your email signature line or on your web site.

8) **And speaking of your email signature line** — do you have one? If you don't, create one. Believe it or not people do follow these links. You'll be amazed how many folks read email signature lines. I have one and change it several times a year depending on what we're doing or promoting or what books I have coming out.

9) **Lend a helping hand:** you can be an answer person at Yahoo Answers, <http://answers.yahoo.com/> — you don't have to spend hours on there but maybe a few minutes a week. Make sure and include a link back to your site by your answers.

10) **Set up a social networking site** using Facebook.com, LinkedIn.com, or Squidoo. It's free and easy to do, just don't forget the all-important link back to your site!

11) **Make sure your blog has an RSS feed** so if you capture a reader you don't lose them if they forget to bookmark your site or blog

12) **Join relevant groups at Yahoo groups**, <http://groups.yahoo.com/>. You'll find everything from groups on growing your small business, writing books, finding your passion, even underwater basket weaving. I dare you to find one that isn't right for what you're promoting. When you do find the right group, join and participate as you can!

13) **Podcasting** is another great way to drive traffic. Start a podcast by going to AudioAcrobat, <http://bookmkr.audioacrobat.com/> — yes, this is our affiliate link. There are other programs you can use, but I love AudioAcrobat. You can record the podcast over the phone quickly and easily and then hit the "send" button on your computer once it's recorded and the system will syndicate it to 27 podcast directories including iTunes. It's a great way to let people know about you and your web site!

14) **Start a blog** and then once you do, start commenting on other people's blogs, linking to them from your site or adding them to your blogroll.

15) **Inbound links**: don't squander your time (or a perfectly good link) on smaller low-traffic sites. Instead spend your time going after high traffic, high quality sites. Good sites should have a PR (page ranking) of 4-6 depending on the market. You can find out what a site's page ranking is by downloading the Google toolbar which comes with a PR feature built in.

16) **Start an email newsletter**: while it may not seem like a newsletter that you email can drive traffic to your site you'd be surprised at the effectiveness of this type of promotion. If your newsletter (like your articles) is interesting and relevant to your audience you'll find that it has a huge pass-through factor. Meaning that it is passed from one email subscriber to another. Also, if you have an email newsletter you should never, ever go to a single event without your handy sign-up sheet. Yes, you can even use offline events to drive traffic to your web site.

17) **And speaking of offline efforts**: if you're ever quoted in a magazine or other publication, make sure and mention your URL as it's appropriate to the topic. Don't be too pushy about this but do not forget to tell folks you have a web site that may be a great resource for the topic of your interview.

18) If you have products to sell why not **get a store on eBay**? This site gets a tremendous amount of traffic and on your sales page you're allowed to list your URL. Another great way to get an inbound link and a way for people to find you.

19) **Load a video** on YouTube and 57 other video sites — if you don't have a video or don't know how to create one contact us and we'll refer you to our fabulous book video people!

20) While this isn't a tip per se it's still important. If you're going to go through all the trouble of getting traffic to your site, **make sure your site is converting** this traffic into something. Get folks to sign up for something, your newsletter, the RSS feed on your blog. Whatever it is, getting their email address will help you remarket to them when the time is right. Studies show that visitors landing on a site often don't buy the first time. That's ok! You want to get them into your marketing funnel so you can market to them again and again — not in a way that's obtrusive, offensive or downright annoying but in a way that is helping them with their own mission. An example of this might be an email newsletter. A helpful, informative newsletter is a fantastic funnel. A blog is another great way to keep people in your marketing loop without bombarding them with "please buy my stuff" email messages. Also, make sure you know what your traffic numbers are before you launch into any Internet marketing campaign. By traffic numbers I mean how many people are visiting your site. You want to know this so you can gauge a before and after view of your marketing efforts.

Penny Sansevieri is the founder and CEO of Author Marketing Experts, Inc, and is a book marketing and media relations specialist. She is the author of five books, including Book to Bestseller, which has been called the "road map to publishing success."

**Cover
To
Cover**
By Lou Aronica



A report from the other side of the table

As you've probably guessed by now, I identify rather closely with writers. While not technically a full-time writer (since writing only takes up about half of my work day), and while I have close and long-standing relationships with many people on the other side of the book business, I do consider myself a writer first. Actually, I've identified with writers for much longer than I have been a writer by profession. While I always staunchly defended the companies for which I worked and always tried to generate as much profit for them as I could, I usually found myself more interested in the writer's perspective on the business relationship than the company's perspective. Admittedly, this was especially easy to do when addressing the Eight Gray Men of my imprint's corporate parent during semi-annual budget meetings (I am a man and I am certainly graying, but if I ever turn into a Gray Man, please let my wife and kids know that I love them and then hit me over the head with a shovel), but it was equally true when listening to complaining sales people or frustrated editors. It wasn't true when I was dealing with blustering agents, but we've addressed that issue already.

I have, however, recently put my toes back into the publishing side of our waters. While I love writing and definitely see myself as a writer first, there was much I enjoyed and missed about publishing. As we've come to the first anniversary of the launch of my little company, I thought I'd share some observations with you about what it's like "over there."

Last fall, agent Peter Miller and I launched an independent publishing imprint called The Story Plant. We've focused the company on the kind of publishing I always loved and, frankly, feel I was best at doing: developing commercial novelists from the early stages of their careers. Peter and I decided to do this because we felt that commercial novelists were getting an especially unfair shake in the industry and that the lack of commitment from publishers to the long-term growth of the writers they published was harmful to both writers and publishers.

We knew what we were doing was a challenge. After all, we weren't trying to fill a niche; we were trying to build a small company around a kind of publishing that only big publishers had been successful with. While you do see the occasional small independent put a book on the bestseller list, you rarely see this with fiction and, when you do, it's a quirky literary novel that somehow generated national attention. We attempted to address this challenge by convincing ourselves, our authors, our distributor, and our accounts that we were planning to take everything slowly. We weren't going to "blockbuster-ize" the writers on our list. Our goal was to start modestly and grow from book to book until we'd proven a market for a writer and could therefore take the next aggressive steps necessary to try to break out that writer.

We also knew that we would face roadblocks. We figured we'd encounter skeptical booksellers, even given my history as a publisher and Peter's success in the book and film worlds. What we couldn't have possibly anticipated was that we would be launching the company into the worst American economy in our lifetimes. That definitely wasn't part of the business plan. When booksellers are trying to plug holes in their bottom lines, they aren't interested in listening to your excitement over a novelist whose name they've never heard before.

The numbers were also decidedly against us. Our original publishing model involved launching our writers

in hardcover and then reprinting them in paperback a year later. Well, the economy has devastated the market for hardcover fiction; this market might well have been hit harder than any other book market during the crisis. We know that the overall numbers for hardcover fiction are down dramatically (excepting Stephenie Meyer, and I'm writing this before the new Dan Brown drops), and while I haven't seen any specific numbers on hardcover first fiction, all anecdotal reports indicate that sales in that sector are exponentially worse. To say the least, this has hobbled a startup like The Story Plant. Still, we've made it to our second year, and I thought you might be interested in a few of the observations I've made from my tiny seat on that side of the table.

Platforms have become as important to new novelists as they are to nonfiction writers. Since most of you only write fiction, you might not know that publishers don't want to look at a proposal for a nonfiction book unless the author has a large platform (a sizeable media presence). They feel this way because it has become increasingly difficult to get publicity for anyone who doesn't already get a fair amount of publicity (yes, we're all aware of the irony) and because booksellers won't take a significant position on any nonfiction book unless the promise of heavy publicity is there. I hadn't encountered the same with fiction in my earlier publishing days or in conversations with other publishers in the ensuing years, but I'm now beginning to see signs of it. Booksellers don't want to offer up promotional space (and I'm not talking about stacks on the front table, but rather any presence in the store beyond spine-out in the section) — even with generous co-op — to a new writer unless that writer already has some level of presence.

This caught us off guard in our first year and has left us scrambling for a way to address this. We are now making a much more concerted effort to pre-promote our new writers. For example, with Laurel Dewey, a terrific suspense writer, we've contracted with Daily Lit (<http://www.dailylit.com>) to serialize for their large readership five short stories featuring Laurel's series character as a run-up to her first mass market title.

For Emily Sue Harvey, a deeply emotional romance writer, we've launched a website (<http://www.renewalstories.com>) built around the theme of her first novel without even mentioning that first novel. The notion there is to establish her as a voice for this theme (she is passionate about it) and then have readers discover her fiction.

What we realize going forward, and what I think all publishers are beginning to realize, is that we're going to have to build an audience for our writers *before* we publish them. While I know that every NINC member has at least two published books under their belts, I believe this thinking applies to any writer in the early stages of his or her career. If your publisher isn't thinking about this for you, you need to address it yourself. We talked about this a little in my last column on marketing, but there's much more to discuss.

Our accounts don't believe the hype. An old tradition in publishing was announcing an aggressive marketing plan and then waiting for the numbers to come in before actually embarking on that plan. If the orders were too low, the publisher scaled back the marketing commitment. Everyone in the industry understood this (except, occasionally, for the new writer whose editor didn't warn her that the announced marketing plans were tentative). Now, though, booksellers just assume the publisher isn't going to do most of the marketing it says it is going to do. This is especially true with Internet marketing. You can tell your accounts that you've hired the best Internet publicist in the business (which we did for one of our spring titles) and that this publicist was going to get attention for the book of an equivalent size to feature pieces in *Time* magazine and *USA Today* (which the publicist did) and they'll simply shrug. I think booksellers are so convinced that publishers either won't do the marketing they say they're going to do or that they'll do this marketing badly, that they simply assume none of it will have an impact on sales. Hence, their desire to know a new writer's platform and their reliance on their own co-op programs — which they will only offer to authors they believe can sell a lot of copies. This leads me to the next observation.

The catch-22 is more prevalent than ever. There was always some level of pretzel logic associated with selling new writers. You couldn't get accounts excited about a writer if the writer didn't have a track record and you couldn't get the track record unless the accounts were excited. This mindset is now at a dangerous place for new writers. Buys at the major accounts for new fiction are often so low that there's virtually no chance the book will have enough of a profile to generate sales (this is much truer in hardcover than it is in paperback, but many accounts are this skeptical about paperbacks as well). Hence, unless ▶

you “blockbuster-ize” an author’s first book (and how often can anyone do that, let alone a little independent house?), you have little chance of building the author’s audience for the next book.

Our approach to both of these last points has been to spend and promote completely out of proportion to distribution. Our feeling has been that we need to prove that the accounts can rely on us for promotion and that this promotion is going to drive consumers to the books, even when the books have modest retail presence. Unfortunately, this really hasn’t been effective. We’ve had pockets of good sales stories that were clearly related to promotion (most notably a direct correlation between strong Internet promotion and e-book sales), but we have not been able to overcome weak retail presence. While the industry is definitely moving from an impulse market to a demand market, the hardcover consumer still gravitates toward the books with feature display. Great online media attention might cause some to purchase that title online immediately, but it isn’t driving many consumers to ask for that title on their next trip to a bookstore.

The consumer still loves commercial fiction. There is something of a silver lining here. As we move into our second year of publishing, we are reprinting some of our early hardcovers and revising our publishing model to focus more heavily on paperbacks. The early reception from our accounts to these paperbacks has been much warmer. The reason is that this consumer didn’t bolt for the hills when the

I do think the clearest message that I’ve seen from my experience with The Story Plant is that finding audiences requires the kind of nuanced effort that publishers don’t have the manpower or firepower to make.

recession hit and most of our accounts are reporting positive sales trends in paperback. The commercial fiction lover is alive and well. They’re still buying lots of books and in fact, in some segments, buying more. Paperback publishing — especially mass market publishing — has its own share of headaches, especially if one is a small publisher trying to deal with wholesalers, but at least it’s a place where new and developing writers can still get a shot.

From the fall of 2009 through the end of 2010, we’re focusing exclusively on paperback publishing. We’re publishing multiple books by our core of franchise writers and eschewing new author launches until we establish this first core. We’re getting some positive feedback about this, but the books haven’t gone on sale yet. I promise a new update when I have more information.

Meanwhile, what do these observations mean for you? If you’re already a major best-selling author, probably nothing. The landscape is rough, but you’re probably okay because readers are showing that they rely on you. For the rest of us, it means we need to rely on ourselves more than we ever have. I know this is something of a recurring theme for me, but you can’t count on your publisher getting the platforming thing right. In fact, they might not even be aware of it, though the booksellers I’ve spoken with resonate with the concept. It’s important to deliver “numbers” to your publisher that go beyond your current book sales. This could manifest in the accumulation of a large e-mail list (this doesn’t mean anything unless it is in the tens of thousands). It could be getting your short fiction out via various high-traffic online webzines. Maybe instead it’s a regular column or blog presence on a heavily visited genre site (preferably one that will allow you to announce your new book to your readers). Traditional print and broadcast media are of course great, but there seem to be far fewer opportunities for novelists in these venues.

I do think the clearest message that I’ve seen from my experience with The Story Plant is that finding audiences requires the kind of nuanced effort that publishers don’t have the manpower or firepower to make. I assume you know what that means.

This new phase of my publishing life is all a bit of an adventure for me right now. I never thought I’d say, “Thank God for my writing career,” but that actually seems more predictable at the moment. One thing that hasn’t changed is how much I love doing this stuff — working with writers, developing publishing programs, pitching books at sales conference. Business conditions in the industry aren’t nearly as friendly as they once were, but we’ll keep slugging away with The Story Plant until they become friendlier or until they beat us into submission.

As always, I’m very open to ideas for this column. Is there some aspect of publishing you’d like me to address? If so, e-mail me at laronica@fictionstudio.com.

Ninc Bulletin Board

COMPILED BY JACKIE KRAMER

Got any news or information for the Bulletin Board?

Send it to Jackie at jackiekramer7@netscape.com

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**WRITING is
TAXING**
By Diane O'Brien Kelly

The Circle of Life — Part Two

The preceding article provided an overview of tax issues faced in the earlier phases of life. Now, let's look at issues for those of us who've been around awhile.

The Middle Ages.

This phase of life poses a broad range of tax issues. Middle-aged taxpayers generally have more income, but may face a divorce or an empty nest, or may find themselves caring for an elderly parent.

A divorce and the subsequent property settlement and payment of spousal support make taxes more complicated. Alimony or spousal support is taxable to the recipient and deductible by the payor. Transfers between parties that are property settlements rather than alimony are not taxable to the recipient nor deductible by the transferor. A divorced taxpayer's filing status will change to single or, if certain qualifications are met, head of household. Divorced or separated taxpayers must determine who is entitled to claim which itemized deductions and exemptions for children. See Pub. 501 "Exemptions, Standard Deduction, and Filing Information" and Pub. 504 "Divorced or Separated Individuals" at <http://www.irs.gov>.

Those enjoying an empty nest may find that, with their children now on their own, they have fewer tax breaks but more discretionary income. These taxpayers can benefit from increasing their retirement plan contributions to the maximum. (You've set up that IRA-SEP for your writing biz like I told ya' to, right?) Middle-aged taxpayers may have paid down their mortgage to the point that the mortgage interest plus other itemized expenses no longer exceed the standard deduction. With careful planning, however, these taxpayers can save taxes by lumping itemized deductions together every other year. For instance, a taxpayer can pay two years' worth of property taxes every other year. If charitable contributions, medical expenses, and other itemized deductions are likewise lumped in alternate years, the taxpayer can itemize every other year.

Middle-aged taxpayers can also reduce taxes by transferring funds to their children or grandchildren through direct gifts or by setting up trusts, Uniform Transfer/Gift to Minors Act accounts, or funding college savings plans for their grandchildren. While no immediate tax benefit is realized on these transfers, less money in the taxpayer's name means less earnings reported and taxed to the taxpayer. Transferring money to others can also reduce the value of the taxpayer's taxable estate upon death. See Pub. 950 "Introduction to Estate and Gift Taxes."

Taxpayers may be able to claim a parent or other relative they support as a dependent, possibly even if the parent or relative does not live with them. See Pub. 501 "Exemptions, Standard Deduction, and Filing Information." If a taxpayer pays medical or caregiver expenses for a parent or relative whom the taxpayer can claim as a dependent, the taxpayer may be able to claim an itemized medical expense deduction or dependent care credit for those expenses. Nursing home fees may qualify as a deductible medical expense. See Pub. 502 "Medical and Dental Expenses" and Pub. 503 "Child and Dependent Care Expenses."

Some middle-aged taxpayers choose to downsize their home or, alternatively, to upgrade their digs.

Taxpayers can exclude up to \$500,000 in gain on the sale of their home if certain requirements are met. See Pub. 523 “Selling Your Home.”

Golden Years.

Those who are disabled or over age 65 may be entitled to a credit. You are considered 65 the day before your 65th birthday. Thus, those turning 65 on January 1 are considered 65 at the end of the preceding tax year. The credit is available only to those with income below certain limits, thus disqualifying many taxpayers. See Pub. 524 “Credit for the Elderly or the Disabled.”

High medical expenses can yield tax deductions for those in their golden years. Nursing home costs, including the cost of meals and lodging, may be deductible if the purpose for residing in the nursing facility is for medical care and not personal reasons. Potentially deductible medical costs are quite broad, and include such things as dentures, eyeglasses, the cost of specialized telephone and television equipment for the hearing-impaired, and even wigs for those who lose hair due to treatments such as chemotherapy.

Those in their golden years may move from their house into a nursing facility. If the taxpayer’s home is sold, the taxpayer may qualify to exclude gain on the sale. Be aware that the “use test” — which requires the home be used as a primary home for two of the last five years — includes periods when a taxpayer lives in a licensed nursing facility.

Expenses paid for care for a spouse may yield a dependent care credit. See Pub. 503.

Some in their golden years take advantage of “reverse mortgages” in which a financial institution pays the homeowner a monthly amount while the homeowner continues to live in the home. The taxpayer retains title, with the loan due on the sale of the home, when the taxpayer moves out of the home, or at the end of a predetermined loan period. Because the monthly payments are deemed to constitute loan advances to the taxpayer, they are not taxable income. Any accrued interest on the reverse mortgage loan is not deductible until actually paid, which is when the loan is paid off in full.

Life insurance proceeds paid on the death of an insured party are generally not taxable to the recipient. Any amount paid by the insurance company that constitutes interest on the proceeds is taxable. Proceeds paid in installments will likely include an interest component that will be taxable. Accelerated death benefits paid before the death of a terminally or chronically ill person are also generally excludable from income. If a taxpayer chooses to surrender a life insurance policy for cash during the life of the insured, however, any amount in excess of that paid for the policy will be taxable.

See Pub. 554 “Tax Guide for Seniors.”

Got a tax question for Diane? Email her at Diane@dianeobrienkelly.com. Your question might be addressed in an upcoming issue. For further tax tips, check out the “Tax Tidbits” page on Diane’s website, <http://www.dianeobrienkelly.com>.

Business Briefs

Life without Harry at Bloomsbury Publishing

Sales were down 25% for the UK company in the first half of 2009 and profits were down 50%. Children’s trade dropped 38%, which was anticipated with no new Harry Potter title this season.

Another Publisher closes

Canadian Kunati Books began the closing process in August. This was *ForeWord Magazine*’s Publisher of the Year just two years ago. It has been reported in various locations that some authors haven’t been paid since the end of 2008.

The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



Filthy Lucre

“If writers were good businessmen, they'd have too much sense to be writers.”

—Irvin S. Cobb (1876-1944), journalist and fiction writer

As a writer, I can't possibly care about money.

I came to this conclusion because so many publishers over the years have treated me as if it *must* be true. And publishers would never lie to me about a thing like that, now would they?

I first experienced this phenomenon as a bright-eyed new writer, when I delivered my third book while still awaiting the signing check for it. The contract had by then gone “astray in the mail” twice, and the publisher refused to send it via UPS so that it could be tracked.

Once I finally received the contract, signed it, and sent it back (via UPS, at the recommendation of the same house that had refused to send it to me that way), I asked if payment could be expedited. I was told it could not. I pointed out that I had already delivered the completed book, but due to delays in their getting the contract to me, I still hadn't even received the *signing* money and was by now having trouble paying my bills.

This, it was made clear to me, was entirely my own problem and an irrelevant sob story to put before a publisher that happened to owe me money.

That response, of course, came from publishing professionals who were receiving steady weekly paychecks for their work—and who I daresay might have balked at continuing to work while months passed without any sign of payment.

But I'm a *writer*, and everyone else in this business knows that we don't care about money or really need to be paid. We live on love alone and feel blessed to starve for our art! So I waited another few weeks for my signing check, by which time I had finished reviewing the line edit of the book I'd written.

On another memorable occasion, my (then) agent notified me one week after I delivered a manuscript that my (then) editor had told him the acceptance check was already on its way. Hooray!

Five months later, I had still not received the check.

Being an obnoxious dolt who had somehow remained unaware of the austere fiscal ethics of my chosen profession, I nagged. Everyone involved in this process treated my desire to be paid like the unmitigated character flaw that it surely was (see above: living on love, blessed to be starving for my art, etc.); and it was only through ruthless persistence that I finally got someone to verify that, in fact, er, no, the check had never been authorized, issued, or sent. I was merely the author, after all, so how important could *paying* me possibly be?

And in exchange for my spending five months nagging to be paid on that occasion, the *next* time I deliv-

ered a book to that same house, it took seven months to get paid.

Serves me right.

Where are my VALUES? I should be willing to write the book for *free* while everyone else involved in its publication is receiving a steady paycheck.

It's important for me, as the writer, to remember my humble place in the scheme of things. After all, *anyone* can write a novel that tens of thousands of total strangers will spend their hard-earned cash and hard-won free time to read.

But how many people can answer a telephone? Type a rejection letter? Fill in the blank spaces on a production schedule? Read a manuscript? Look up an entry on Bookscan? Attend meetings?

We're talking the few, the proud, the brave—the publishing professionals!

Who am I, a mere award-winning author, to expect equal treatment—such as, oh, getting paid in a timely fashion—when confronted with people whose achievements are of such daunting stature compared to my own humble (nay, negligible! irrelevant!) contribution to the publishing process—i.e. the book itself?

Obviously, they deserve to be paid for their work in a timely fashion while I, just as obviously, do *not*.

This self-evident truth no doubt explains why four different publishers did *not* pay me in a timely fashion last autumn—an experience which, due to my stubborn character flaws, leads me to regard *this* autumn with some anxiety and fatigue.

One small press had to be reminded in late December, for the third year in a row, that I had once again not received a royalty statement from them all year; thus nudged, they sent a check by Christmas. Another publisher sent my check to the wrong address (one that was three years out of date), ensuring that I received it a month late. And in following up with a different small press, I realized that they hadn't sent me a statement for several years; the cumulative check finally arrived, after much nagging, in 2009.

Meanwhile, the publisher of *Rejection, Romance, and Royalties*, the volume of my collected columns about the iniquities of the writing life, didn't pay me at all. After several months of nagging them and being ignored, I finally felt so exhausted by my immoral quest for payment (or at least for the scheduled semi-annual accounting of my sales) that I made them an offer: If they'd simply revert all rights to me, so that I *just didn't have to deal with them anymore*, I'd never come after them for any further accounting on this book.

And, gosh, after four months of ignoring me, they suddenly responded within twenty minutes, saying: It's a deal! They also said the book only *appeared*, on its previous royalty statement, to be within \$25 of earning out its advance; in fact, it was no longer selling and all existing stock was about to be remaindered, destroyed, or shipped to Afghanistan as building material in the reconstruction effort there. (Okay, so I made up the last one.)

However, that was six months ago, and, as of this writing, the book is still stocked and selling at full price at all major online booksellers.

Do I regret bowing out of this book's earnings while it still has a shelf life? Or have I finally found my moral center and ceased to expect to be, oh, *paid* for my professional work?

Mostly, as it happens, I simply realized that I was wasting too much time and energy on my frustrated and (by then) clearly doomed efforts to get paid by the house that bought and released my book about (let's pause for a moment to savor the irony) the outrageous ways in which publishers abuse writers.

This outcome serves me right, no doubt, for expecting even more filthy lucre for that book just because *others* are still earning money from it.

Laura Resnick is currently writing her next novel for a publisher which, defying all norms and values of the profession, paid her rather promptly for her previous novel, go figure.

Ask the Lawyer

Q: When an author has the rights back on a previously published book and is looking to sell it as an e-book, can the author legally use the original cover to market the book? (Since there's no physical product, the cover would be displayed on the Web, but not printed/produced with the book.) Or any portion of the original cover?

A: No, the author does not have the right to use the original cover to market the book.

Where the book's original cover contained artwork (such as a drawing, painting, or photo) it is entirely possible that even the original publisher lacks the right to authorize such use by the author. Publishers typically contract cover art out to freelance artists. Most often, the publisher acquires only the rights it expects to use, since artists price each usage separately. Frequently, those rights are not assignable by the publisher.

So, if you would like to use the publisher's cover art, you should ask the publisher to review its purchase agreement for the artwork, and to let you know whether it has the right to assign its rights in the cover art to you, and, if not, how you might contact the artist yourself to acquire those rights.

Keep in mind that the publisher will also have made contributions to the cover (such as adding title and author information, together with any sell copy, in type fonts and sizes selected specifically for that cover), and that its permission will also be required.

In most cases, it probably will be more expensive and aggravating to acquire the necessary rights than is worthwhile.



Advice given in this column is general and brief, and is not based upon a thorough review of facts and considerations in any given instance. You should consult an attorney in depth if you need personal legal advice.

To submit a question for this column, email to CMyersTex@aol.com. For more information about Robert Stein, visit his website, <http://www.pryorcashman.com/attorneys-119.html>

THE RESNICK/MALZBERG DIALOGUES

Writing Myths: Part 2

BY MIKE RESNICK AND BARRY MALZBERG

Barry: Selling cheaply as a means of exciting interest is not so much a myth as a misunderstanding to which newer writers are prey; give it away cheap, undersell the competition, live 120 years. Except that it doesn't work that way, just as with delivering the novel six months early proves that you must be an awful hack writing yard goods, so selling yourself cheaply means that the work is cheap. Publishers are already contemptuous enough of most of the genre work they publish, they tend to get nervous though if the writers suggest that they are even more contemptuous. This is not the way to go.

That there *is* a definite way to go, a clear career path is another myth, one of the most dangerous; newer writers think that a writing career can be compared to a medical or legal career or perhaps one in business . . . go to school, get a degree, get in at the entering level, work your way through the corporation or the patient list, get into a partnership, etc., etc. It doesn't work that way of course; as my friend Carter Scholz noted years ago "There is no career path for writers" and that cannot be uttered strongly or repetitively enough, *There is no career path for writers*, most writers as Nelson Algren said kind of fail into it, come to writing as a means of not having been successful (or not feeling successful) somewhere else and even then they just kind of wander around. Careers begin, advance, go into inexplicable retrograde, collapse, soar, seemingly out of the writers' control; they are unpredictable most of all to those having them and yesterday provides little clue to tomorrow in career terms (maybe a little more so in terms of fulfilling contracts). That dense and tangled wood in which Dante's protagonist found himself distinctly resembles the world of the writer. In *Zuckerman Unbound*, Roth's eponymous protagonist thinks about Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting For Godot* and thinks, "What is all the fuss about? You can find the same thing going on in Zuckerman's study at 11 AM every morning." Dr. Angst makes home visits. Of course you will deny this circumstance in your own life but, as I wrote a long time ago (Dialogue 7 or 8?) you write from the authority of success, I from the authority of failure, and failure, old pal and comrade, can teach you a few goddamned things that success never will.

Give us more of the benefits of success, please.

Mike: The greatest benefit of success is that you know better than to believe or do damnfool things, which brings me to yet another myth, perhaps the most pernicious one since damned near every book on writing, every article on writing, and every lecture on writing gives lie to it, and yet it persists. It is believed as fervently by newcomers today as it was back when you and I were breaking in forty years ago—and it is the myth that an agent can sell things that an unknown and unheralded writer cannot sell.

Now, there are a lot of reasons for having an agent. They have foreign desks, with contacts that would take the average writer years to establish. (Well, the good ones do.) They know the ins and out of contracts, and (especially) they know that killing such-and-so a clause will be accepted by Publisher A but is a deal-breaker at publisher B. They tend to be much more cognizant of the marketplace, and any changes and fluctuations in it, than most writers are. During negotiations they act as a buffer between the writer and the editor that he must eventually work with. They know of markets that are in financial trouble, and they know of potential markets that will soon be kinetic.

But despite the myth, an agent cannot sell an unsaleable manuscript. Not no way, not nohow. ▶

They can get it out of the slush pile. No question about that. They can get it read faster. Absolutely.

But if the book's a turkey, the editor's not going to buy it simply because an agent—even an agent he deals with all the time—submitted it.

Now, part of the myth is that not only can an agent sell your unsaleable book, but also that an agent can get you a bigger advance—and if your book is not unsaleable, it's probably true. But if the publisher pays you 15% more, it's a wash; if he pays you 10% more, you're actually coming out behind after your agent gets his 15% commission.

There's nothing onerous about an agent making a living. The good ones earn their commissions and then some—but new writers who think that the extra \$500 that an agent can get them on a contract is going to go into their pockets are due for a major disillusionment.

And new writers who think that an agent can get them one red cent for an unsaleable book are due for an even bigger one.

Barry: Quite right on agents. Also (and we have been at these Dialogues for so long that repetition is becoming unavoidable, also unavoidable the harking back to those halcyon days of 1999 when I was so young and vigorous) a point that I made way back: the new agent you've taken on because the old agent has (you think) failed cannot invent new markets. She must deal with the same group of suspects as the old one; no agent is good enough to come with a completely new group of editors and publishers any more than the new divorce attorney can come equipped with an entirely different set of matrimonial laws from your state. Some divorce lawyers (and agents) are better at maneuvering through or around the extant situation, but all of us must live within the circumstances we are granted. Which is another way of noting that if your old agent can't sell the novel the new agent almost certainly can't. Mileage figures vary, of course.

Two more myths deconstructed:

1) Good work always sells, always finds a publisher. It may take much longer than it should, may bring less money but you can't keep a great novel or short story down, which is why writers should clutch passionately to Heinlein's Fourth Law: "You must keep it on the market until sold." Fred Pohl is fond of this one, has long propitiated. He does so most forcefully as part of a long contribution in the *Collected Pitfcs*.

Fred Pohl is and always will be admirable—great writer, superb editor—but he is wrong. Just not so. Good work does not always sell. The best novel of the thousands I read over my all too many decades in the Scott Meredith fee department never found a publisher. (For the record: *Beneath The Frozen Sea*, a mainstream novel by Herbert Brown, a then 51-year-old attorney in Cincinnati, 140,000 words.) Was in fact rejected for marketing by the Agency's senior editors (not my fault, boss!) That was 23 years ago and I have no evidence that it was ever in print. It's one of the forty or fifty best novels I have ever read. The *second* best novel I saw in the fee department, *The Resurrection Runner*, cannot recollect the author's name, borderline science fiction like Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate*, 100,000 words) was marketed by the Agency but took 40 rejections and was returned. Jody Scott's superb *Down Will Come Baby*, a novel set against the Berkeley upheavals of the mid-sixties, never sold as a book; I cut it in half and ran it serially in *Escapade Magazine* of which I was briefly Managing Editor 35 years ago and it was never heard of again. There are many, many other novels and even more short stories of great merit which I encountered at Scott Meredith and in other editorial capacities which never sold. "Talent is not disqualifying in this business" I noted a long time ago, but I wouldn't go much beyond that.

2) A corollary of the above: Because great work will always, eventually, find its way, it is possible for a writer devoid of personal connection to editors, publishers, the community of writers itself, to nonetheless have a significant career through simple, avid persistence.

Well there's Alice Sheldon and Paul Linebarger (that's "James Tiptree, Jr." and "Cordwainer Smith" to us) who in their working careers never met anyone associated with the field, worked out of post office boxes and nonetheless had records of brilliant accomplishment but these are the kind of exceptions which, flaunted by those who know better, sustain the myth. (Like the narratives of unpublished writers whose work was sold for great sums of money, the

kind of narratives with which Scott Meredith festooned his fee brochures which over the decades were mailed to millions.) Lana Turner was purportedly “discovered” in a drugstore and Jacqueline Bouvier was an Inquiring Photographer with a Washington DC newspaper too (of course Ms. Bouvier had certain familial advantages) but as Damon Runyon would write, that is not the way the money goes. Most careers, particularly in our genre, are accomplished, propitiated, advanced by personal connection, by direct contact with editors, by a network of friendship and obligation (why do you think so many editors become writers?). There may come a time in the career of a few writers when the accomplishment and fame are such that they can become recluses and continue to sell—Thomas Pynchon, of course—but they are not exemplary.

It’s as much of a contact business at its heart as sales. New writers fail to learn that at their peril. Fortunately most learn it relatively early. I did.

Mike: There are still a lot of myths to be debunked, so I think I’ll handle a batch of them on this turn.

One is that a Hugo or Nebula will substantially increase your advances. Not so. If you’re a new writer, and you’ve won one of those awards for your short fiction, and you go to sell your first novel, then yes, you’ll get more for being a major award winner because you have no track record as a novelist. But once you have a few books out there, ten Nebulas won’t do you as much good as earning \$10,000 in royalties over and above your advance on your last book. Novels are a lot like racehorses: past performances don’t necessarily determine winners and losers (though they’re a good indication), but they sure as hell determine prices.

Another myth: the fact that Hollywood options your book or story means they’re going to make a movie of it. Well, maybe they will, but the odds are still well over 100-to-1 against it, even after you’ve collected your option money. I’ve gone into this before, here and elsewhere, but let me repeat it very briefly: every Hollywood executive knows that he’s better off optioning five hundred books a year and making none of them, than making the wrong one. At least half of the Hollywood execs are quite literally in the business of *not* making movies.

Let’s shatter this myth too: the fact that an editor talks to you at a convention and encourages you to submit to his magazine or book company implies sincere interest. Nope. Never forget that the editor is there representing the publisher, at the publisher’s expense. His transportation is paid, his room is paid, his meals (and those of anyone he takes out to eat) are paid . . . and trust me, the publisher isn’t shelling out that money so that the editor can discourage writers from submitting and send them off to sell to a rival.

Another one: you can campaign so subtly for an award that no one will be aware that you’re doing so. Uh-uh. 40 years into the Nebula and half a century into the Hugo, every type of campaigning and vote trading has been seen so often by so many jaded writers and fans that you won’t be fooling anyone but yourself.

And one that forms the basis of most contract negotiations: the fact that your book didn’t earn out means the publisher lost money on it, and hence can’t pay you as much for your next one. It’s always possible that the publisher *did* lose money, but the fact of the matter is that the publisher’s break-even point is a hell of a lot lower than the writer’s. He can make a tidy profit before the writer ever sees a penny of royalties, and he counts on this argument when negotiating with an unagented writer.

Okay. Have you got some final myhtakes you want to address?

Barry: Author of *The Resurrection Runner*, I now recollect, was Robert Wood Anderson (who wrote a little autobiography toward the Agency’s unsuccessful marketing effort noting that he had once been a Doodletown Piper.) It is a myth that I can no longer remember details. I *can* remember details. Some of them. Granted time, patience and a stress-free environment.

Two more myths:

1) The “crossover” book. Best way for the genre writer to escape the strictures and limited audience of genre is to write something which will have a “broader commercial appeal,” usually through the simplification of genre ▶

themes and a simpler, cruder plot structure. The audience for even terrible science fiction movies is much larger than that for most written science fiction; the “crossover” through that simplification will get some part of that audience.

Well, again no, it really doesn't work that way; most attempts by genre writers at such crossover fail dismally, being neither quite one or the other . . . neither a satisfactorily rigorous and sophisticated genre book nor a work with mass appeal because the handling is uncertain and because publishers, sales divisions, retailers, and wholesalers are not comfortable with books out of category by writers already branded. Example: the late and very fine science fiction writer Rick Raphael (1919-1994), author of *Code Three* (Simon & Schuster 1964) and most highly regarded within the genre, decided in the early 1970's that he wanted to become Robert Ludlum. He didn't even manage Rick Raphael . . . a spy technological thriller (the term “tekno-fiction” wasn't coined for another decade) for St. Martin's Press failed direly and a second attempt never even sold. Raphael then tried to get back to science fiction—sold a story to *Stellar*, maybe a couple in the '80s—but it was never the same for him again and at the time of his death he had been forgotten by all but devoted fans and a few anthologists. Raphael crossed over, all right (as will we all), but not in the way intended.

2) A dandy myth is that the way for a writer in sales trouble (steady decline) to beat the computer is to adopt a pseudonym and start again. Sometimes—very occasionally—this works. Usually it doesn't. It doesn't because—I quote the agent Russell Galen here—“Unless the writer is able to come in with an entirely different kind of novel, the same pattern of failure will quickly replicate and the writer will be doubly doomed.”

“Doubly doomed.” Aha. How does that work as a proposed Gilbertian subtitle for this series. *The Resnick-Malzberg Dialogues, or Doubly Doomed*”? Oops. I meant “singly doomed of course.”

Mike: One last myth to puncture before I prepare for a season of watching 16 other teams puncture the myth of the Cincinnati Bengals' defense . . . and this may well be the one that hurts the most when it proves to be nothing but a myth.

The myth is that the editor is on the writer's side, and will go to the wall for a good book that the publisher doesn't want. The problem is that many editors and writers become fast friends, and many editors *do* fight for their writers—but the bottom line is that the publisher pays the editor's salary, and when it becomes a choice between letting a manuscript go or getting fired over it, the only editors who sacrifice their jobs and their incomes may well have had impaired judgment in other areas as well, like editing. When all is said and done, an editor (or anyone else's) loyalty lies with the guy who pays the bills, and all the friendship and convention dinners and shared gossip won't change that.

But wouldn't it be nice if it did?

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