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President's Voice

By Wayne Stinnett



Where has the time gone? Registration for this year's conference closed a few days ago and down here in the South, the oppressive summer heat is upon us. But wasn't the 2018 conference just a few weeks ago? And didn't it snow yesterday? It does seem that way at times.

As writers, we should understand the passage of time better. We have deadlines and commitments. I know some of you are saying, "But Wayne, aren't you an indie?" Yes, I am. But I still have deadlines. They're just self-imposed. My written schedule spans the next two years. I published two books July 1 and will publish another Nov. 28, another May 18, 2020, and still another in October 2020, with three more scheduled in the spring, summer, and fall of 2021. Self-imposed, but deadlines, nonetheless.

That's one of the many reasons I've enjoyed my association with NINC and the friends that I have found here. They hold my feet to the fire, and I, theirs. We all need someone to keep us accountable at times. Friends who know what we're going through on a day-to-day basis—the struggle of balancing a successful writing career with the demands of family and life. Friends who are in the same boat, trimming the same sails. Friends to cheer us on in good times, and a shoulder to lean on when things go south. Why is that a term for something bad, anyway? I've traveled far and wide, well beyond our nation's borders and the souther I go, the better I feel.

Anyway, we're only seven weeks—51 days to be exact—from the day when we will once more gather on the beach, to fill our minds with new ideas, methods, and plans for success. I urge y'all to bring your A-game. If you haven't already looked over the lineup on the website, we have a fantastic group of speakers and industry pros for indie and trad authors alike, and plenty of after-hours activities planned to keep you busy. My schedule is completely clear starting on Sunday when I arrive, so I can unwind and prepare, then dive right in.

See y'all at the beach!

Wayne Stinnett, President
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NINC Member Benefits

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already. The Pro Services Directory, member [discount page](#), and [sample letters](#) are also great resources.

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#). You can also [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

Accessing the NINC Website

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>

Wayne Stinnett writes your typical murder and mayhem in paradise. His characters and plots come from real people and situations he's encountered, fictionalized to protect the guilty.

Consider Yourself Invited

Assistant editor sought for *Nink* newsletter

Are you naturally curious about how-to info and critical business advice for authors? Do you enjoy seeking out and connecting with knowledge experts? Can you commit a block of time each month to help maintain a robust newsletter for NINC members?

If so, *Nink* needs you to serve as assistant editor!

Published 12 times per year, with two issues devoted to coverage of the annual NINC conference, the *Nink* newsletter is an important part of NINC membership. It features high-quality articles focused on the business of being a novelist.

As assistant editor, you will:

- Contribute ideas to the editorial calendar.
- Source Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and request articles.
 - Provide *Nink* policy to SMEs (copyright, kill fee, payment info) before SMEs submit work.
 - Request bios, head shots, payment info from SMEs.
 - Format bios per *Nink's* policy (50-100 words, links OK).
- Source article reprints (such as from author blogs, non-NINC publications, articles of interest to the membership). Seek editor's permission first to confirm payment parameters, then seek reprint rights from copyright holder if approved by editor.
- Provide first-pass editing and formatting on submitted articles and reprints.
- Coordinate monthly column submissions (as assigned by the editor).

This position may transition to full editor in 2021 when current editor Michele Dunaway completes her service (The president appoints the newsletter editor, which is board position.)

Assistant editor duties would begin in October 2019, so that you can work with the current assistant editor for a few months before her term ends Dec. 31, 2019. The newsletter works on a publication schedule that is approximately two months in advance. This means we will start working on January in October.

This is a great opportunity to “get your feet wet” and learn the details of serving as editor and perhaps as a future member of NINC's Board.

If you have questions about the assistant job, please email Susan at ninkassistanteditor@gmail.com.

To be considered for the post, please send an email with your qualifications to *Nink* Editor Michele Dunaway at: ninkeditor@gmail.com.

(PS—the board will consider some form of conference comp for this post at its August meeting. More details to be posted on the loop later in the month with the decision.)

Authors and the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA)

How authors can calculate and, possibly maximize,
the new qualified business deduction

By Donna MacMeans, CPA



The recent Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) affected all businesses in 2018. Looking back, we can see how those changes can maximize tax savings. First, while TCJA affected all businesses, only the changes to C corporations are permanent. Changes to small businesses, however, are only in effect for the 2018-2025 tax years. If legislation is not passed before the 2025 expiration date, the laws revert to those of the 2017 tax year.

What were those changes? Before TCJA, C corporation income was taxed at multiple rates on a sliding scale. Now, all C corporation income is taxed at 21 percent.

For every other US business (S corporations, sole proprietors, partnerships, LLCs etc.), the changes to TCJA are more complicated. These businesses are typically referred to as “flow through” businesses—as income from the business tax filing flows through to the personal tax return of the owner(s) and is thus taxed at personal rates.

In an effort to give flow-through tax entities the same benefits of C corporations, the tax code established a new 20 percent deduction called the Qualified Business Income (QBI) deduction for income created in the United States. QBI only applies to flow-through businesses, not C corporations.

Calculating the amount of the new QBI deduction can be challenging as it created a new term and a separate set of rules for a specific group of businesses. Analyzing this new categorization may yield an increased QBI deduction for authors who combine multiple revenue streams into one entity.

Specialized Service Trade or Business

In a Specialized Service Trade or Business (SSTB), the principal asset of the business is the reputation or skill of one or more of its employees or owners. SSTBs include actors, athletes, lawyers, accountants, consultants, etc.

Clearly, the income authors generate would be considered SSTB. Our writing skills and creative abilities establish the reputation of our work and brand even though editors and cover designers may be involved in the final product. Our author name is a critical asset to the generation of income.

However, publishing that work is not an activity qualified by SSTB restrictions. If it is possible to separate publishing income and expenses from writing income and expenses, there may be some opportunity for maximizing the QBI deduction. This would be most applicable to those authors who, in addition to writing and publishing their own work, also receive income from publishing the work of other authors. A separate entity would need to be established for this outside publishing work.

Screenwriters may also be in a unique position. If the screenwriter is adapting another author's original project for the screen and they do not receive any recognition for the final product, then, I believe an argument can be made for exclusion from SSTB restrictions. This is best resolved with your personal accountant.

Once you have characterized your flow-through business income, you can move to the next step—determination of the amount of the QBI deduction.

(As this article is specifically about the deduction available to authors, I'm not going to discuss the non-SSTB deduction. See your personal accountant for the applicable wage and property limitations on that deduction.)

Determining the QBI deduction

In order to proceed, we need to (1) consider income that is never treated as QBI, and (2) look at our total household income to determine thresholds.

Certain income is not QBI, even if it is associated with a US business. Wages received are not a component of QBI even when received as a S corporation shareholder-employee. For example, assume you established a S corporation for your writing business. You are the only shareholder. The business, according to the 1120S tax return, has an income of \$120,000 after a deduction of \$80,000 for wages paid to yourself. The 20 percent QBI deduction will be based on the \$120,000 bottom line. The \$80,000 will be treated as wage income on your 1040 tax return even though it is associated with your writing business. Limiting personal wages could possibly yield a higher QBI deduction.

The ability to deduct the 20 percent QBI deduction is also predicated on household income thresholds. If total taxable income before the QBI deduction is below a bottom threshold, the full 20 percent QBI deduction can be taken. If total taxable income is higher than the upper threshold, no deduction for QBI will be allowed. If the total taxable income falls somewhere between these two thresholds, a reduced QBI deduction can be taken.

In 2018, the bottom threshold for total taxable income for a taxpayer filing as single was \$157,500. Married taxpayers filing jointly had a bottom threshold of \$315,000. In 2019, the bottom thresholds are projected to be \$321,450 for married filing jointly, \$160,725 for married filing separately and \$160,700 for all other taxpayers.

The upper threshold in 2018 for taxable income was \$207,500 for a single taxpayer and \$415,000 for married filing jointly taxpayers. In 2019, the upper thresholds are projected to increase to \$421,450 if married filing jointly, \$210,725 if married filing separately, and \$210,700 for all other taxpayers. Taxpayers with total taxable income equal to or above these upper threshold amounts cannot take a QBI deduction.

Note that the **phase-out range** between the lower and upper thresholds is \$50,000 for single taxpayers, and \$100,000 for married filing jointly. Total taxable income that falls between the lower and upper thresholds will generate a QBI deduction as follows.

Assume in 2018 Mary has writing income of \$30,000. Her total taxable income before the QBI deduction is \$185,000. She files as a single taxpayer. If her taxable income was under the lower threshold, her full QBI deduction would have been \$6,000 ($\$30,000 \times 20$ percent). However, because her total taxable income is higher, she is not allowed that full deduction. The allowed deduction is calculated as follows:

1. Subtract the appropriate lower threshold from the total taxable income to determine the excess above the lower threshold. ($\$185,000 - \$157,500 = \$27,500$)
2. Subtract this excess from the phase-out range. ($\$50,000 - \$27,500 = \$22,500$)
3. Divide this amount by the appropriate phase-out range to determine a percentage. ($\$22,500 / \$50,000 = 45$ percent)
4. Multiply this percentage by the amount of QBI deduction she would have received if her taxable income hadn't exceeded the lower threshold. ($.45 \times \$6,000 = \$2,700$). Mary's 2018 QBI deduction would have been \$2,700.

As total taxable income approaches the upper threshold, the allowable QBI deduction for the SSTB income approaches zero. Had Mary filed as married filing jointly with total taxable income of \$315,000 or less, she would have been able to take the full deduction of \$6,000. Or conversely, if filing jointly means the total taxable income exceeds the upper threshold, consideration should be given to filing as married filing separately if that yields a reduction in taxes. Filing status makes a difference.

Regardless of the filing status, a QBI deduction is not allowed if the total taxable income is zero or less, or if the net of all SSTB activities yields a loss.

A licensed CPA, Donna MacMeans writes seductively witty historical romance in what can only be described as her dream job. A Romance Writers of America © Golden Heart winner, she has also received Romantic Times's Reviewer Choice Award for Historical Love & Laughter, as well as many other awards. She still maintains a small tax practice.

Why Authors Use Multiple Pseudonyms to Reach Different Markets

By Rachel Kramer Bussel



For authors looking to publish in multiple genres or subgenres, writing under several different names can help them extend their reach, publish more often and develop new audiences.

When [Zoraida Córdova](#), author of the young adult fantasy Brooklyn Brujas series and the Vicious Deep trilogy, wanted to expand into romance with a new publisher, she chose the pen name [Zoey Castile](#) for her Happy Ending series, which includes the novels *Stripped*, *Hired*, and *Flashed*. The impulse was practical, with her future titles in mind.

“I want to start writing middle grade novels, so it’s such a younger market. I don’t want a 10-year-old Googling my name and seeing chest man covers. I love those covers but I want to be more sensitive toward that,” Córdova said.

Norma Perez-Hernandez, assistant editor at Kensington Books, who works with Córdova on her Zoey Castile books, said it was always the intention to publish them under a new name.

“In general, it can be beneficial for writers and publishers to use multiple names, whether it be to distinguish their novels by genre/audience, start a new sales history with accounts, or work on a new author persona to connect to their readers in an alternate way,” Perez-Hernandez said.

For author [Jenn McKinlay](#), who writes mystery as well as romance under her given name, branching out into pseudonyms Josie Belle and Lucy Lawrence was part of a work-for-hire deal when she was first breaking into the mystery genre.

“I knew that the publisher would retain the copyright of the books, so I didn’t want to use my own name and then have my name be unusable should I sell my own series in the future,” McKinlay said.

Benefits of a pseudonym

Michelle Richter, a literary agent at [Fuse Literary](#), said it makes sense to use a pseudonym if you're an author looking to rebrand in a new genre. Another positive time for a pseudonym would be "if they'd written more literary work that was critically praised, and now wanted to write something more commercial, but their sales track for their previous work could make a new sale challenging." Richter also noted that some authors may use initials to create a gender-neutral name or to set one type of writing apart from another. According to Richter, a pseudonym "can help a writer reach separate audiences with all the things they want to write, yet without making them appear unfocused or confusing and frustrating readers who expect a certain kind of book from the writer."

Because so much of the publishing business depends on how previous books have sold, a pseudonym can also be a way to start fresh.

"I think that for writers, changing their name is an opportunity to rebrand yourself if a series doesn't do well, which was the case for my first romance series. It functions as a clean slate," Córdova said.

Knowing that you'll be publishing under a different name may even affect the writing process.

"I noticed my creativity was different under the pen name. I took more risks being Lucy and Josie with my characters and plots because, hey, it wasn't me. It was quite liberating," McKinlay said.

Being a "debut" author all over again

Nicole J. Persun wrote two fantasy novels under her own name, which were published in 2011 and 2013, but when it came to breaking into women's fiction with *The Ingredients of Us* in July 2019, her new publisher, Lake Union Publishing, wanted her to use a pseudonym so they could "debut" her in the genre. Persun, who also has two forthcoming women's fiction titles with them, used her middle name and an homage to a childhood horse, Goldie, to come up with [Jennifer Gold](#).

"Since so much of author branding is through social media, I wanted to choose a name that could potentially sound like the name of a friend," she said. "My target audience are women in their thirties and forties, and Jennifer was a popular name in that generation of women; I felt like it was a strong name to represent the friendly brand I wanted to create."

Challenges of a pseudonym

For Persun, the initial task of crafting an online persona for her pseudonym felt "daunting," especially after having done that the first time around.

"I'd spent a lot of time building all the necessary online properties for my real name—the website domain, social media, and newsletter—and had established a respectable following and strong SEO. With a new name, I had to start from scratch," she said.

Córdova said that at a book festival, romance readers were calling her Zoey, which took her a little while to adjust to, since she was used to publishing under her given name. While the decision may be a practical one, it can take getting used to.

“It’s strange to see a different name that isn’t yours on your book but it’s a personality that you’re creating whenever you choose to create a pen name. It’s like the author version of [Beyoncé alter ego] Sasha Fierce,” Córdova said.

Branding your pseudonym

While McKinlay chose not to set up social media accounts as her pseudonyms, since those titles don’t generate royalties, Córdova has two separate websites for each of her names.

“It’s important to differentiate between the brands in terms of color schemes, font choices, design choices very specifically, because you want to be able to have a clear, distinguished look when you go from one website to the other website,” she said. “I use two different author photos for the most part. My Zoey Castile website is very pink and very simple whereas my YA, my Zoraida Córdova website is all black.”

For Persun, after her initial hesitation, she welcomed the opportunity for a fresh start by using her pseudonym.

“The ability to create a brand mindfully and strategically from the very beginning has allowed me to be more focused and intentional about where I want my career to go,” she said. “It has also allowed me to build a quality platform from the ground up, with a genuinely engaged following.”

Separating your personal life from your writing

While some authors choose not to disclose their other author selves, Córdova said since she uses her photo on her Zoey Castile social media and does events as Zoey, she can’t tell people, “Please ignore the fact that you’ve seen my face.” She has even found that since a lot of her young adult readers are actually adult women, when she’s told them about her racier romance novels, they’re often eager to read those as well.

For Persun, an unexpected benefit of writing as Jennifer Gold has been that her pen name “has allowed me to separate my personal life from my work in a healthy way,” she said, especially when it comes to social media. “It’s hard to move through life as an individual *and* a brand—especially when relatives don’t always understand the difference between a promotional post and a personal post. I’ve found it liberating to keep my personal life separated from my brand. I think it helps me maintain a level of professionalism online that would be more challenging if I only had the one name.”

Rachel Kramer Bussel is the editor of over 60 anthologies, including the Cleis Press Best Women’s Erotica of the Year series and teaches erotica writing workshops around the world and online. She writes about book publishing for Forbes online, and has been published in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Marie Claire and other publications. Follow her [@raquelita](#) on Twitter.

Author Almost Crushed by Billion-Dollar Gaming Company

It could happen to you!

By Michael L. Banner



The following story is true. The names and book titles have been changed out of respect for the actual author. What he experienced could have happened to any of us... until now.

John Smith is a best-selling author and award-winning screenplay writer, who recently found himself facing a serious legal problem.

Someone had filed for a federal trademark on a brand name that John was already using for a fictional series he had penned three years earlier. Potentially worse, that someone was a billion-dollar video-gaming enterprise, with millions of subscribers. They were seeking an "Intent to use" trademark in "Computer game software and related items" and also "downloadable digital media and downloadable audio files." The word they wanted to trademark, "Blacktree."

"Blacktree" is the name of John's Amazon #1 best-selling two-book series, and the name of the protagonist and hero of that series, Bobby Blacktree. His series included ebooks (legally described as "downloadable digital media") and audiobooks ("downloadable audio files").

John's ultimate plan, after a highly successful test-market of a five-book series in the same genre, was to leverage the "Blacktree" brand he had created and launch additional books in the Blacktree series in 2019 and 2020. After which he would complete the screenplay and market it to Hollywood.

That *was* his plan, before he received notification about the pending trademark registration from one of his Google Alerts watch phrases.

Legal concerns

John had previously established (by publishing his books) a prior claim to the rights of the series brand name. However, if this gaming company was granted their federal trademark

registration, they would have obtained all rights to that name under the rules and regulations established by law and managed by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO).

The gaming company would then have total control over whether John could use the Blacktree name, not only for his two existing ebooks and audiobooks (and the main character's name in the series,) but also for future Blacktree books and screenplay.

At minimum, the gaming company could have had Amazon take down his Blacktree series in all its forms, simply by filing a complaint with Amazon and presenting a copy of their trademark. And, because this gaming company had a long history of aggressively protecting their registered trademarks, John could have been looking at a devastating lawsuit if he tried to use the name Blacktree in any future works.

Simply put, if John wanted to sell any more books (current or future) in his series, and the gaming company proceeded forward with their trademark application, John would have had to change the name of his series and main character; update the ebook and audio files; and rebrand future planned books, the screenplay, and everything else associated with it.

John clearly had only one choice: he filed an opposition to the gaming company's trademark with the USPTO. Simultaneously, he filed a trademark registration of his own for the brand "Blacktree." Legally, John had a clear case of establishing the brand three years prior and thus, he would have a clear path to have the gaming company's trademark request quashed by the USPTO, and then have the USPTO approve his own trademark registration. Simple, right?

Wrong! We are forgetting something disturbing about our legal system: *"Whoever has more lawyers and money, usually wins!"*

In this case, the gaming company *really* wanted this name. They also had time on their side because it normally takes a few years to have an online computer game developed, tested, and released. Even though John legally had first-use rights, the billion-dollar company and their team of lawyers could easily have buried John in appeals and requests for extensions, and if they desired, lawsuits. At hundreds of dollars an hour for attorney representation, essentially, they could have financially ruined John with just the legal fees alone, forcing him to give up, so that they would prevail.

Other concerns

John's financial well-being was not all that was at risk.

The national news media covering computer gaming caught wind of this battle, and incorrectly reported that John was "suing" the gaming company. Additionally, they erroneously reported that John was responsible for stopping the gaming company's next release of their beloved online role-playing game; a game that boasted millions of over-zealous, fan-boy players.

That's when the backlash started.

Immediately, thousands of gamers began posting their comments of hatred against John, sending John angry and physically threatening emails, and blasting him with endless social media posts. Some even posted negative reviews on his books. All this because John had the nerve to defend his brand.

Before revealing the end of this story, let us look at the lesson we should all learn from John's experience.

Lesson learned

Authors *must* proactively protect themselves against trademark infringement.

That is, **you must take two actions to preemptively protect yourself** and avoid a potential battle like the one John faced.

1. Thoroughly research your series name and book titles *before* publishing, **and**
2. File for a federal trademark under one or more publishing categories.

Thoroughly research your series name

You have probably already searched Amazon's database for similar-sounding book titles, just to see what is out there. Maybe you have even Googled your prospective book title or series name to see if someone is using it in your book's genre. That is a good start, but do not miss another *very* important resource. Before pushing that publish button, search the USPTO database to make sure your series name and book titles are not infringing on a registered trademark in the publishing space.

To do this, go to [USPTO.gov](https://www.uspto.gov). Under the "Trademark" banner, choose "Searching trademarks" from the drop-down menu. Now find the "Search our trademark database (TESS)" link. You will want to use the "[Basic Word Mark Search \(New User\)](#)" option and type in the name of your prospective title.

You may see several hits. Make sure you review them all, one at a time. What you are looking for are "LIVE" registrations. If there is already one registered (and Live), and you see that its "Goods and Services" section includes a series of numbers starting with either IC 009 or IC 016 (the two classes for books), then someone has already registered that name in the publishing space. You will need to modify your series name and/or book titles, otherwise you risk Amazon turning your books off at some point in the future for trademark infringement.

However, if you do not see your prospective titles already registered (and Live) or they are listed in the database but are not in the two publishing classes, you are good to go for publication.

File your own federal trademark

If the name is available for trademark under the publishing classes, then immediately *after* you publish your series, file for a federal trademark on that series name.

A strange quirk in trademark law that most authors do not know about, is that while you can trademark a book series title as a brand, you cannot trademark a single book title. You must use the same name for more than one book before it's considered a brand and eligible for trademark protection. In other words, you can trademark a name if it is used on two or more books because it is now considered a "brand." That's true for book titles and series titles. More

than one book with the same title or series name must exist and be used (or intended to be used), *before* it's eligible for protection.

This brings up another point to consider.

Even if the USPTO database does not show a trademark issued for your series or book name, you need to look on Amazon to see if anyone else is using that exact name on more than one book in their backlist. If so, then they have prior trademark rights, having established a brand for that name, even if they have yet to file for the trademark. You will need to pick a new series name or book title to avoid potential infringement problems down the road. None of us want another "Cockygate" scenario.

[Editor's note, for more on this and to read Nink articles written about this topic, please review the July 2018 issue in the Nink [archives](#).]

Trademarks are filed in one or more Goods and Services classes. Again, the two International Classes (or IC) covering books are 009 (for ebooks and audio books) and 016 (for print books). Each class will cost \$225 to file, or \$450 for both. If you are worried about costs, file for at least one: class 9, since that is likely your most profitable book class. While not cheap, think of this as an "insurance policy" to protect you against someone trying to steal your brand and/or threaten your ability to sell your books under that name on various platforms like Amazon.

Bottom line: What we do as authors is a business. Businesses have assets that need to be protected. Our books and their names are some of our most important assets. Smart business practices dictate we proactively take steps to protect our series names and book titles, before someone else takes these rights from us. Or worse, someone with deeper pockets crushes you financially, just for using a name they want, even though you had all prior rights to it.

Epilogue

"So, what happened to John?" you ask.

After thousands of dollars in legal fees, John and the gaming company reached an amicable agreement. The terms are confidential, so the actual settlement remains unknown. My hunch is that John is both relieved and pleased with the result. And yet, the settlement only occurred after his reputation took a beating and he suffered many sleepless nights. Don't put yourself in the same position as John.

Michael Banner is an international best-seller, penning eleven novels as [ML Banner](#). Next up, his Self-Publishing Empire Series of books, beginning with [Set-Up: The Easy Way to Start Your Own Publishing Entity](#). A serial entrepreneur, Michael has formed dozens of businesses over thirty-five years, including [SmallBiZ.com](#), which has helped more than 100,000 to start their own corporation or LLC. He serves on boards of other start-ups and has consulted thousands, assisting them on how to setup and manage their own enterprises. Recently, he and another NINC member, co-founded [Mission Critical Publishing LLC](#). On his "off" days, Michael's wife "forces" him to relax at their Mexican beach or cruise to another foreign port.

The Art of the Ending

Part One

By Michele Dunaway



I must confess—I’ve only seen half of an episode of HBO’s *Game of Thrones* (GOT). Excuse One—I don’t have premium cable. Excuse Two—it’s not my favorite genre if I’m going to sit down and spend time watching TV. Excuse Three—I could follow along via the spoilers.

But even though I didn’t watch any, it didn’t matter—even I know how it ended. I read spoilers after my Twitter and Facebook feeds blew up with reactions to the ending, which ranged from anger to disbelief to wow to “it was okay.”

At the same time the ending of GOT occurred, two other things happened. One was I that read a review of a Harlequin Presents novel where everyone on Goodreads said, “This book felt unfinished. I wished it had an epilogue.” The second thing was I read Sally Thorne’s second book, *99 Percent Mine*. At the end of *99 Percent Mine* was a bonus feature—the original, never released short epilogue to her novel *The Hating Game*, and her thoughts about it.

Clearly, all of these proved to me that endings are complicated things.

Hence, this series of articles. Part I delves into what makes a memorable ending. Part II (debuting next month) focuses on how authors use this knowledge to craft endings that leave at least the author or the reader satisfied.

Let’s look at GOT’s ending first. Twitter abounded with fan memes criticizing the writers (We kinda forgot how to write) to mocking Bran (When You Don’t Contribute to the Group Project and Still Get an A). Luckily for GOT, *The Big Bang Theory* ended soon after and the overall reaction to that series finale was much more positive, taking the heat off.

Despite this, many writers tried to dig deeper, and even Michael Hague got into the [action](#), declaring:

“I understand the pain that so many feel because the saga did not end with the happier, or more romantic, or more uplifting resolution they might have hoped for or expected. But even in the face of all that disappointment and anger, my question is this....*Game of Thrones* gave us an unequalled television experience that captivated and enlightened millions of viewers around the world. With an epic story, and a multitude of rich, complex characters, it stirred deep emotions, and generated conversations and analyses and arguments that brought together all of us who loved it. So instead of now berating its creators, shouldn't we simply be saying, 'Thank You?'"

Hague's article focused on each character's arc and how his or her journey made sense—and he argued that because the ending stirred up deep emotions and brought people together, that was ultimately what mattered.

Other writing blogs also seemed to reiterate this point: the key to a good ending is that it strikes a cord with the readers' emotions. As authors, when we create, as we weave the story, our craft determines what emotions the readers will feel. In fact, if we as writers have done our jobs correctly, our readers feel these emotions that we want them to feel.

Case in point. I write romance. My books will always end with a happily-ever-after or a happy-for-now ending. While there might be a few twists and turns along the way, most likely there's not going to be a huge surprise at the end: the two main characters will be together in a relationship. We know this before the book starts. My readers may not chew on my book for days after, but they should feel some sort of a warm fuzzy moment at the end of my books. If not, I didn't deliver. I let them down.

For other genres, the ending may deliver a different type of an ending—such as a cliffhanger. There's also the surprise ending or a twist that no one saw coming. Mystery series often do this. The villain might not be who we thought it was, and that's half the fun.

Sometimes the author wants to create pure shock value. When I taught English I, two short stories I used were Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace" and Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger." The ending of each has the kids going "No way!" While the first ends at the climax and contains no falling action or resolution (What happened to Madame Loisel after she learned the truth?), the other poses a question and leaves the reader hanging. The emotions the kids experience are strong. My students become emotionally invested more with these than they do after reading O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi." In fact, I like to teach O. Henry's "A Retrieved Reformation" because the ending is so much stronger and leaves the readers with much more to discuss.

So if endings are about giving our readers an emotional response, that brings up a larger question—how do we, as authors, leave our readers satisfied while at the same time satisfying ourselves? The [original ending](#) of the movie *Pretty Woman* was far darker, but it became a Disney R-rated fairytale instead (that made oodles of money).

The synopsis for my book *Hart's Victory* didn't start off with the heroine's son surviving leukemia. But he's alive and well (and in remission) in the finished novel because the editors thought his death would be too dark for a category romance. In retrospect, it was the right call, and even the writer of *Pretty Woman* [said years later](#) the movie may not have even been produced if it stayed as originally written.

But as GOT showed, there are times writers can't please everyone. *Titanic* uses Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio) as a foil to Rose (Kate Winslet). To have him fit on that piece of wood and live means she wouldn't have been free to make her own choices at the end. Yet, we debate it over and over, which at least is proof the ending gave us an emotional response.

Titanic also uses what can be considered the full circle ending. The movie ends where it started. The opening scene shows the discovery of a picture of a woman wearing a priceless necklace. The ending shows her dropping the necklace in the ocean before peacefully dying. (However, in case you didn't know, there was even an alternative to that you can see [here](#)—and frankly, it sucks.)

Harper Lee's opening for *To Kill a Mockingbird* brings up Jem's broken arm, and an ending scene showing how he broke his arm pushes the book to its closure. John Steinbeck uses the full circle in *Of Mice and Men*. He opens with a long description of a bank of the Salinas River valley, where George tells Lennie once again the story about how they will own a farm of their own. The book closes in that same location—a violent ending that destroys their dream.

It's important to note Steinbeck's agents didn't like the book (or its original title, *Something That Happened*). They considered the work too depressing, among other things. Yet Steinbeck wanted it this way, [defending his book](#) by saying, "I'm sorry that you do not find the new book as large in subject as it should be. I probably did not make my subject and symbols clear. The microcosm is rather difficult to handle and apparently I did not get it over—the earth longings of a Lennie who was not to represent insanity at all but the inarticulate and powerful yearning of all men."

Even today the book is criticized and challenged because of its ending, an ending Steinbeck was determined to keep. He held out for his satisfaction rather than that of his agents.

His receiving a 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature for his collective works settles the argument. In fact, in his [acceptance speech](#), Steinbeck said, "The writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit—for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion and love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally flags of hope and of emulation. I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature."

Perhaps this is the ending we strive for as writers, that no matter our genre, that no matter the emotions we draw, we want our readers to learn something, to feel something, even if, as in my book's case, the lesson is love triumphs.

But going back to Disney, Steinbeck's idea of the perfectibility of man is seen in the ending of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, **[spoiler ahead]** where Jyn and Cassian sacrifice themselves and die for the cause of freedom.

But that wasn't always the case. The original scripts had these main characters escaping the planet before it exploded and living. This was because the writers and creator weren't sure Disney would accept such a dark ending.

As [Gary Whitta said](#), "The original instinct was that they should all die. It's worth it. If you're going to give your life for anything, give your life for this, to destroy a weapon that is going to kill you all anyway."

The production team convinced Disney, and the movie ends with their deaths, instead of the happier ending that was scripted, but never shot. As the creator of the story [John Knoll said](#), “It would have been a bit of a cheat and thankfully, as development went along, everyone agreed that just killing everyone was a more heroic, fitting, and simpler piece of storytelling.”

And that, my fellow writers, is where we’ll leave off until Part Two.

[Michele Dunaway](#) loves happy endings. It doesn’t have to make sense as long as it’s happy. She also wants you to know that the information about Rogue One (which she has seen) came about because of a suggestion from her older daughter, who declares Rogue One to be “the perfect movie.”

Audio Rights

Weighing your choices to get the best return on investment

By Michele Dunaway



Eight years ago, audio was a new frontier and a burgeoning blip on the self-publishing radar. Today, it's part of a multi-faceted approach to publishing and an expanding market. Download a file, Bluetooth your phone to your car's entertainment system, and you can listen to a book on your commute without even having to plug anything in. Those days of tape? CDs? Gone.

As the audiobook field grows, authors wonder about what to do when considering contracts and rights. The bottom line—it all comes down to money and to reading your contract carefully.

In the quest for producing your own audiobook comes the first question of "Can you afford it?" What you are paying for is number of finished hours. Through the years, plenty of conference reports (found in the 2017 and 2018 November and December issues of *Nink*) have covered this topic extensively and profiled audio book vendors such as ACX and Findaway Voices.

In a nutshell, there are different routes for production:

1. Your traditional publisher licenses the book to an audio book company or uses its own, in-house audio subsidiary. *You have no upfront costs.*
2. You pay the producer directly and own your files outright when the contract with your audio publisher ends. *You are responsible for all upfront, self-publishing costs.*
3. You can use a royalty sharing system where you share royalties with the producer as part of a self-publishing agreement. *You do not own your files outright at the end of the contract.*
4. You can contract directly with the audio book company such as Tantor and Audible and receive an advance against royalties. *This process works more like a traditional contract with the publisher paying the upfront costs.*

The choice you make affects not only the rights you have to the audio file but also impacts your return on investment, and it's important to weigh not only the route you want to go, but to read the contract and terms of service.

NINC President [Wayne Stinnett](#) writes "stories about murder and mayhem in paradise." For him, audiobooks are a part of his selling strategy, and he's chosen to pay the producer directly and publish through ACX.

"Back in 2015, when I was trying to decide whether to produce audiobooks or not, [Chris Fox](#) was a big influence, telling me how his books were doing. My goal at the time was to produce one audiobook every other month, to catch up to the series and become current within a year. Besides money, I think a book's product page is lacking if there aren't three publishing formats."

When you are paying for audio directly to the narrator, what you are paying for is the finished hours. Producers (the term ACX uses) often will belong to [SAG-AFTRA](#), which bills itself as the most distinguished entertainment and media union in the world. Audio book publishers have a catalog of producers to choose from, and finding a good producer is important. Stinnett found his after multiple auditions.

"Nick Sullivan was the 63rd and last producer to audition for my first audiobook," Stinnett said. "I'm glad I waited; I had it narrowed down to five, but just couldn't make up my mind. His rendition of two of my minor characters did the trick. He's not just my narrator anymore. We're good friends and have gotten together several times. We're both divers and are planning a dive trip next spring. He's a veteran of stage and screen, plus over 400 audiobooks. Today, he's the voice of my main character, Jesse McDermitt, and is heard on Pyrate Radio advertising my books, at least once every hour."

ACX, which Stinnett uses, is an independent arm of Audible. Going exclusive with ACX means you will get more of a percentage, but it's a seven-year contract. If you don't cancel at least 60 days prior to the end of the contract, it renews automatically for one year.

ACX also offers something called royalty share (option three above). This is good for those who don't have the money to pay a narrator upfront. Royalty share might be the only way for an author to get the book to the audio market. However, as this is a royalty-share contract, you will not own your audiobooks outright. This means that depending on how the books are doing, at the end of the contract, the producer may want more money. Your choice will be to either pay more/renegotiate with the producer or walk away. If you walk away, you will be needing to re-record your book with a new producer if you want to publish it again.

So what does it cost to record the book yourself? Your out-of-pocket costs can range anywhere from \$250-400 per finished hour (PFH). Thus, a book can cost anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,000 to record.

"When I first started with my producer, he explained it to me," Stinnett said. "He started at \$200 per finished hour, but with the stipulation that I get him up to his usual \$300 PFH after three books. I now pay him even more than that."

Stinnett had a strategy that showed him that royalty sharing wasn't the way he wanted to go, and he shared it so that others can see his process. Again, this is Stinnett's process and each author must make the best business decision for them.

"Assume a cost to produce a 10-hour audiobook at \$300 per finished hour, for a total of \$3,000," he said. "For the narrator to make that amount in royalty share, the audiobook would have to produce \$6,000 in revenue over the seven-year period. Six thousand dollars divided by an average \$3 per sale equals 2,000 sales in seven years. Anything more than that, the producer would earn more in royalty share, and the rights holder would have been better off with the flat fee. Seven years is 2,555 days. Those 2,000 sales divided by 2,555 days, equals .78 sales per day or 23 sales per month. Producing anything with the goal of selling less than one a day is just a bad business decision in my opinion. Even the manufacturer of the new yacht I bought turns out one per day."

As readers do get attached to narrators, losing control over your audiobook rights can be troublesome, especially as people will follow narrators from book to book. If you are recording a series, and half is with one narrator and half with another, this can be problematic for readers.

New York Times best-selling author [Angie Fox](#) (no relation to Chris) writes quirky Southern mysteries. She paid for her narrator and published her Accidental Demon Slayer series through ACX. She negotiated rights directly with Audible for her Southern Ghost Hunter series.

"I did a cold email and pitched," she said. "I made the decision because Audible can be really good at promoting its own titles and I wanted to explore it."

Angie Fox negotiated the contract herself, and considered her terms with Audible better than what she had while agented.

"It was a very comfortable process," she said. "They keep more than ACX but they have control over placement. They've done special promotions I could never do myself. I'm reaching new audio audiences and have seen a huge increase in sales."

Angie Fox viewed the process as akin to a salary negotiation.

"Ask for what you truly think your books are worth. The worst they can say is no. We've been conditioned to take what publishers offer and be grateful. But by simply having the conversation, I got more yes than no. You won't get the best price or terms for your work if you don't ask for it," she said.

Angie Fox saw moving to Audible as the next logical step in her business plan. "If they don't contact you first, it's not that they don't want you. Audible is growing so much it can be a bit slower. It made sense to reach out and ask if they'd be interested in my new series."

Like Stinnett, Angie Fox considers return on investment and advises that you choose the titles that are your strongest. You also want the longer books because shoppers will use their credits to purchase books.

"Audio should release when your book does, or as close as you can possibly get to your release date," she said. "Market the book and mention that it's available in several formats."

There might be a lag, however, in your audio release following your book release, simply because of the nature of the audio business and scheduling. A short lag is a month, but a longer one can be several. Stinnett works to release his audio at the same time. His formula of his

books being profitable meant his audio books had to pay back the investment in one year, which is what Chris Fox told Stinnett his books did.

“He told me of the different royalty amounts based on how the listener purchased an audiobook, but that his averaged out to about \$3 per sale,” Stinnett said. “That meant to cover the estimated \$2,400 per production, each audiobook would have to sell 800 copies in the first year. The first one sold 41 in the first month, which I knew would grow as more were added on, so I continued producing them. It sold 850 in the first year and more than paid for itself. More recently, I’ve found that the time to reach a positive ROI is now down to less than three months.”

Michele Dunaway serves as your Nink Editor. She’s ready for the beach and hopes to see you there.

An Insider Look at Traditional Publishing

An interview with Assistant Agent Kortney Price

By Michele Dunaway



Kortney Price

[Kortney Price](#) was (and still is) that person in the bookstore who recommends books to strangers based on what they're buying. When she realized that she could make a career out of helping authors and getting excited over books, she decided to pursue a career in agenting. So, after graduating with a B.A. in English from Greenville University in 2014, she started out with her first agency internship. Since then she has interned with Andrea Hurst & Associates, Amphorae Publishing Group, and Inklings Literary Agency. She was an associate agent at Holloway Literary before finding her home with Corvisiero Literary Agency as an associate agent focusing on middle grade and YA.

Below follows my interview with Kortney, whose answers represent only her opinion and not those of any other industry professionals.

1. In this new age of publishing (traditional, hybrid, self-pub), why is it important to have an agent? What can agents do that authors cannot do themselves?

Super short answer: pitch to most major publishing houses...

Longer answer: To me, an agent is a member of the author's support team. We are here to cheer our authors on and provide support in whatever way possible. I'm an editorial agent, so I help my authors polish their stories before we start pitching. I'm here to help with brand building, marketing, networking, and career planning. I've spent the time poring over publishing contracts and learning what is standard in the industry so I can best advocate for my authors.

2. Besides "writing the best book," what are things an author can do to advance their career? What are some "career" busters or mistakes that traditional published authors may not even know they are making?

Great writing is a must, but marketing is hugely important. I feel like publishing is romanticized as an art-first industry. While, yes, we all go into the field because we are passionate about the art of writing and story, it's a mistake to forget that this is also a business. Authors must be hugely proactive in marketing their works. Identify your target audience and find ways to engage with them on a level deeper than "Buy my book!"

3. How can an author be the best author for their publisher and/or agent? How can authors be part of the team? How can authors create sustainability in their careers and what steps should an author take for achieving that?

The authors I have the best time working with have open minds. Sometimes we get ideas in our head such as "this book will be sold by December," or "I will absolutely *not* change that scene." I'm a middle child (a born mediator, if you will) so I'm always happy to talk through an author's thoughts and feelings toward whatever is going on. However, if an author isn't willing to consider any other option, it becomes impossible to move forward and disappointment is inevitable.

4. When receiving multiple offers for a manuscript, what are the most important factors in making the decision as to what publisher is best? Are there things besides money?

The advance is obviously an important part of the deal, but just focusing on it when picking a publisher would be short sighted. I would advise anyone who is fielding multiple offers to look at the long term. What kind of marketing will the publisher do? What's happening with the sub rights? When do the rights to the work revert back to the author? Do you believe that the editor you'd be working with has the same vision for the story as you do? Do you see future works being a good fit for this publisher? Every author places a different level of importance for each piece of the contract. Know what your long term goals are and go with the publisher who will best support those goals.

5. How important is an author's social media when choosing to sign an author?

For fiction, social media isn't all that important to me. What matters most is an author's willingness to work toward building their brand and platform. We can always work on strengthening social media presence if the author is willing to put in the work.

6. What should a publisher do for an author in the way of marketing (there's a basic minimum of promotion that every book gets for which authors may not even be aware of when they say, "My publisher did nothing for me!")?

Depending on the publisher and their thoughts toward how your book fits into the current market, you'll get a different level of marketing support. They will generally devote more resources to books that they feel have the best chance of catching fire. If you feel that your publisher is doing nothing for your book, ask your agent or editor about what's being done. Some marketing is done completely behind the scenes and you might not realize it. When in doubt, ask.

7. What is your biggest success, or your most surprising success/fail?

I think the most surprising thing about my journey is where I ended up. When I first opened to queries I was majorly against horror stories, but the first thing I signed was a MG adventure with horror elements. I'm SO happy with my "dark and stormy" stories as well as sweet, humorous works. I consider my biggest success is the group of talented authors I've signed on to work with. I cannot even begin to tell you how incredible they are!

8. What are you currently repping? What trends do you see in YA/middle grade?

I'm currently working with MG and YA authors on their adventure, thriller, horror, and fantasy novels. Fantasy is getting a bit saturated, but there is still interest there and I firmly believe that the stories my clients are working on have great potential! Horror is on the upswing and LGBTQ and diverse representation are obviously massively important. The only thing I wish was getting just a bit more attention would be special needs representation.

9. Besides having a great manuscript, what does an author need to know about switching genres?

Study, study, study. Read widely in your new genre and consider the shifts you'll need to make in reaching the target reader of that market.

10. How can an author support their trad published books in ways that the publisher perhaps can't or won't? What can authors do? What promo works?

Traditional publishers don't typically interact directly with the readership of the individual author's book. That's totally up to the author. Your brand and your platform are all up to you. Building a community and trust with your readers is the absolute best way for an author to promote and sell their books.

11. How does a professional author handle ghosting (never getting a reply) from a potential agent who'd requested a work?

The best way to respond to not receiving a reply is the same as any other rejection... take a deep breath, sulk for a bit (if you want), and move on. Most agents would gladly reply personally to every query we receive, and when the day is suddenly 36 hours long and we find a way to give up sleep, we will definitely do that. Until then we have to deal with the hundreds (sometimes thousands) of queries we receive a month in the best way we can. For me that's a form letter. For some it's only responding to those that catch their eye. It really depends on the workload. We really don't mean it personally.

12. If you could look into your crystal ball for January 2020 and beyond, where do you see the market headed? What trends might be coming? What do readers want more of, and what are readers tired of seeing?

I've been noticing an increase in wish lists that involve horror elements or straight up horror. When it feels like the world sucks, I've noticed that people either run to light, happy books or lean in and dive deep into the dark, horror stories.

13. How has the #ownvoices movement or need for diverse voices affected publishing acquisitions and books/authors the agency acquires?

I think it has made room for books that would have been considered a “tough sell” before this shift and that makes my heart so happy! I’m a huge supporter of diverse representation in books and I’ve learned a lot from this movement. It has made me a better agent, and I think it gives us a chance to really shape the way future readers see the world.

14. Tell me a little bit about why you love this job and your current goals.

There is nothing about my job that I don’t love. Working with my clients is an absolute joy and no two days are ever the same! Speaking with authors at conferences and getting to travel are major perks as well. My current goals are focused around building my list and finding that perfect YA psychological thriller, YA adventure, MG adventure, disability rep in PB, MG and YA, and a heartbreakingly sweet MG contemporary.

Michele Dunaway has traditionally published 26 romance novels. She serves as your Nink editor.

Genre Switch-Up

Save your creativity, part 2

By Denise A. Agnew



Last month several authors shared their experiences with changing or adding a genre to their writing career. This month several more writers reveal their career paths and advice. It's evident that their decision to take the plunge and switch up genres has been rewarding on many levels.

Author [Brian Meeks](#) writes noir mystery, thrillers, YA, science fiction, satire and epic fantasy. Not only that, but he writes non-fiction about being an author. He even slipped in a non-fiction book about the 1987 University of Iowa men's basketball team.

When I asked him which genre he started writing in first, he said, "I wrote the Henry Wood Detective series first as blog posts. It wasn't until I had completed four novels that I decided to pursue self-publishing."

Meeks admitted his reason for starting with the genre was merely because he thought it would be fun. (As a creativity coach, I can't tell you how refreshing it is to hear an author say they're doing something for the fun of it.) Meeks also said he didn't hesitate to write in another genre, and he's never regretted the decision to venture into other avenues. Switching-up genres helped his creativity.

"I try to use a different voice and craft unique characters," he said. "It's made me a better writer because each genre has different needs to make it work. I've learned a lot through the process."

Meeks offered advice to authors considering a switch-up in genres: "It's a personal decision and one I made because I was doing well enough from the first books that the risk was reduced. I would likely have made more money if I had only written the mystery series, but I wouldn't have enjoyed myself as much."

Meeks said, "My decision was based partly on the fact that I was doing well enough that if any of my other dalliances turned out to be a blunder, it wouldn't set me back too much. This is the same reason I undertook the non-fiction part of my book business. It was something I wanted to do, and I felt it would be a smart business move."

Meeks's technique continues to be successful for him. *Mastering Amazon Descriptions* and *Mastering Amazon Ads* have done exceedingly well for me, and because of that, I decided to write epic fantasy this year. These non-fiction books are the reason I get to speak at so many conferences and they led to my course, which has been a nice additional bit of revenue. Multiple streams of income make the book business easier, so the non-fiction turned out to be a smart move. I always make my initial decisions based upon the business, but then when something pans out and I can afford to do other projects because they make me happy, then I go for it. The Magellan Apocalypse series was a perfect example."

His advice to authors? "So, I would say that if your first goal is to be a full-time author, then stick to one genre, but if you start to feel burned out, or stop enjoying the writing, pick another genre. It just might be the juice you need to keep getting those words on the page."

Prolific author [Jennifer Ashley](#) writes mystery, romance (historical, paranormal, contemporary), urban fantasy, and historical fiction. Ashley said she first started her writing career in fantasy.

"I sold my first short story in that genre," she said. "I grew up writing fantasy and loved it and dreamed of being a fantasy author. However, I realized that whenever I wrote a story, I wanted a romance in it. So, I began reading the romance genre, found books I liked, and started writing in that style. The first novel I sold was a romance. But the second was a mystery!"

What made her decide to try another genre?

"I wrote romances, mysteries, and fantasy (mostly shorts in fantasy) at the same time. I figured I'd submit them all until one was bought. I did not anticipate that two publishers would offer at the same time, one for romance, one for mystery. I was thrilled. (I make it sound easy, but it was a long, hard journey)." Ashley didn't hesitate to write in other genres because she'd "always planned to write several genres." She doesn't regret making the decision.

"I understand now that writing more than one genre makes the process to success take longer (it's easier to build readers in one genre at a time), but I would not change it. I love writing multiple genres and have found success in more than one," Ashley said. "Also, writing more than one genre hedges my bets in a volatile industry. When the audience for one genre suddenly drops away, I'm not scrambling to figure out what to do. I turn my focus to the genres that are doing well, and either write the other for the fun of it or wait for the market to change back to it."

Writing in more than one genre boosted her creativity.

"I am not a person who can do the same thing for very long. If I am tired of, say, cowboy romances, I can switch to Victorian mystery and take a breath," she said. "Also, reading and writing across genres lets me bring something new to each genre I write."

Ashley had this advice for authors considering writing multiple-genres: "Don't be afraid. Realize that it might take you longer to build an audience if you don't focus on one genre, but there are multiple rewards."

[Matt Buchman](#) writes romantic suspense, contemporary romance, thrillers, science fiction, and fantasy. He started first in science fiction because he's "a huge fan and revert to it every chance I get."

What made him decide to write in more than one genre?

"I sold my first SF to a small romance house," he said. "The publisher took me to RWA National to prove that men write romance, even though I didn't at the time. I read my first half-dozen romances at night during the conference and got hooked. I just had to give it a try and wrote my first contemporary. What happened then was I was fooling around with an action romance and ended up with a romantic military thriller. I sold that to a larger publisher, who offered on a whole series if I could twist it to military romantic suspense. That launched my career."

Buchman's enthusiasm for multiple genres boosted his creativity.

"I love the challenge," he said. "I'd write in at least those five genres all the time...if there was time. I still **actively** write in all of them. Wearing my business hat, yes, I wish I focused more on one genre or even just one or two series at a time, but I haven't. My creative side is very happy. By writing in multiple genres, I'm forced to think about characters and story structure in an ever-changing kaleidoscope of ways. I think this keeps the challenges of storytelling more interesting to me and offers greater depth of character and story to my readers."

His advice to those considering a genre switch-up is definitive: "Love the genre. Know the genre. Stop reading in that genre. To be creative, I can't have someone else's works in my head. It's hard, because I write in the genres I love. Every time I read another military romantic suspense I feel my own creativity narrowing rather than expanding. My best advice? There is no box except the one you think you have to fit in. Stop doing that!"

I couldn't have said it better than Buchman just did. I've been telling writers the same thing for a long time.

So how does an author discover other genres that might intrigue them if nothing jumps out immediately? Dedicate a journal to novel ideas. What is the craziest idea you've had for a novel and is it out of your current genre? If it is, write down your brainstorm for the story. Keep journaling about the new genre. No idea is too crazy or silly. In fact, the idea you consider to be the most out there and crazy might be the best one you have.

Next month, four more authors give us insight into their genre switch-up careers.

Denise A. Agnew is the award-winning author of over 69 novels and screenplays. Denise's novels Love from The Ashes and Blackout were optioned for film/TV by Where's Lucy? Productions, Bright Frontier Films and MDR Entertainment. Denise is a writer/producer (Where's Lucy? Productions, Happy Catastrophe Productions, Bright Frontier Films), a paranormal investigator, Reiki Master, and Certified Creativity Coach. As a creativity coach, Denise assists anyone in the creative arts to maintain lifelong creativity. You can find her at www.deniseagnew.com and www.creativepencoaching.com.

The Mad Scribbler

Returning to Roots

By Laura Resnick



“Sadly, like Borders, B&N as a publicly held company had to please institutional investors, which meant, among other things, that it hired many executives from outside the book industry. Sometimes it’s been helpful to have a non-industry perspective, but the flood of non-book people helped sink Borders and has had, in the end, a bad effect on B&N.”

—John Mutter, editor-in-chief of Shelf Awareness

In 1886, a Harvard graduate named Gilbert Clifford Noble got a job as a clerk at Arthur Hinds & Company, a bookstore in Manhattan. (So it’s not a new thing, I guess, that an expensive college education leads to a humble job in retail.) Eight years later, Noble became a partner in the business. In 1917, he bought out Hinds, took on William Barnes as a new partner, and changed the name of the business to Barnes & Noble.

In 1930, a few years before Noble died, he sold his share of the business to William Barnes’s son, John. Not long after that, the store moved to 18th Street and Fifth Avenue, which would remain its flagship location for many years (it closed in 2014). B&N expanded over the next few decades, opening additional New York locations, as well as stores in other cities. The company remained in family hands until a couple of years after John Barnes died in 1964. Then in 1971, businessman Leonard Riggio purchased it for \$1.2 million. Under Riggio’s leadership, B&N expanded over the next few decades to a nationwide chain with hundreds of stores and developed a range of new marketing and sales strategies, including deep-discount pricing.

The B&N superstores spreading rapidly across the landscape during the late 20th century met with criticism — the stores blamed for causing the decline and disappearance of many local and independent booksellers. (The 1998 movie *You’ve Got Mail* turned this phenomenon into a rom-com starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan—while Ryan loses her store, she finds love and happiness as a book editor). The obvious logistical and economic advantages of a national conglomerate competing with little mom-and-pop shops were significant factors in B&N’s

growing dominance. However, speaking as a book addict, another factor was certainly that B&N offered an exceptional browsing experience compared to many local indies around 30 years ago.

B&N had a *lot* more titles than my small local bookstores back then, making it fatally easy for me to find far too many books I wanted to buy. They also stocked most or all books in a series, whereas at my local indies, I was used to hearing, “Sorry, we only have book three of that [seven book] series.” So, yeah, back then I loved B&N superstores.

Anyhow, in moving with the times, B&N launched a website in the 1990s, the same decade the company went public. By 2012, B&N was the last remaining national bookstore chain in the US; Borders, Waldenbooks, B. Dalton, and Crown were all gone. B&N was now selling ebooks on its website and had introduced its own e-reading device, the Nook. Yet there was no victory lap for the last-chain-still-standing.

By this time, B&N was closing more and more of its stores, retreating from the aggressive expansion of the previous decades. Amazon, the major disruptor of the book world, had “already badly hurt the traditional book-selling business, once dominated by Barnes & Noble and Borders, by selling lower priced items online and offering quick and efficient shipping options,” according to [Forbes](#).

B&N’s digital business was also struggling. When new-ish CEO William Lynch resigned in 2013, [Forbes](#) interpreted it as a “signal that Barnes & Noble couldn’t manage to compete with Apple or Amazon.com—Nook sales had already fallen 34% in the previous quarter. And now Lynch’s ousting after just three years further underscores the company’s growing frustration with the Nook business.”

Several more CEOs came and went after that, none of them lasting as long as a cheap pair of flip-flops. More B&N retail locations closed. The digital business continued to stagger and stall.

“It seems like Barnes & Noble has been on its final chapter for years,” CNN Business [noted](#) in early 2018. “Slumping sales, closing stores, and a big swing and a miss on digital have hurt the book chain.”

A month later, [TechCrunch](#) journalist John Biggs [wrote](#), “I’ve been chronicling the slow demise of B&N for years now, watching the company bleed out, drop by drop, until it has become a shell of its former value.” He reported that B&N had just laid off 1,800 people across hundreds of stores, all of them full-time employees. “Further, the company laid off many shipping receivers around the holidays, resulting in bare shelves and a customer escape to Amazon.”

“Barnes & Noble’s stock fell nearly 7% to \$4.62 in midday trading, in contrast to its peak at above \$30 in 2006,” [Forbes](#) [reported](#) this past autumn. B&N was by now on a five-year streak of declining sales, and “Barnes & Noble’s loss last quarter widened to \$17 million, from \$10.8 million a year earlier.” Yet around the same time, the American Booksellers Association [announced](#) that book sales overall were up by at least 5% over the previous year.

[Forbes](#) writer Andria Cheng also pointed out that blaming Amazon for B&N’s problems rang hollow. After a visit to B&N’s Union Square location in Manhattan, she described being unable to find staff in whole sections of the store, as well as a puzzling arrangement of wares:

“Alongside bestsellers, signed copies and books sorted by category are... journals, toys, candles and diffuser sets, tea and chocolate selections. In the kids' area, backpacks and other school merchandise were marked 50% off among the expanded toy aisles... At the end of the visit, one couldn't help but wonder: What does Barnes & Noble stand for, and what does it want to be?”

Meanwhile, according to [Quartz](#), “As chains have faltered, indie bookshops are experiencing a resurgence in the US, increasing their numbers by 53% to more than 2,500 stores between 2009 and 2019, according the American Booksellers Association.”

Taking all of this into account, why not just wish B&N a quick, painless death and a dignified funeral?

Well, according to John Mutter, the book industry still needs Barnes & Noble. Mutter is a former editor at *Publishers Weekly* and co-founder of [Shelf Awareness](#), which publishes newsletters for readers, librarians, and people in the book industry.

“If B&N disappeared,” Mutter [says](#), “publishers and wholesalers would have so many fewer brick-and-mortar stores to sell to, which would mean all kinds of cutbacks in sales, marketing, distribution, warehouses, etc., that service indies and B&N.” Because it’s so big, his argument goes, it’s an essential element in maintaining a thriving US book industry.

Whether B&N will survive in the long run, let alone thrive, remains to be seen, but it will certainly change. B&N is going private; it has been sold to Elliott Management Corp., a US-based equity firm. “And now that Barnes & Noble will be a private company,” [notes CNN](#), “it no longer has to worry about quarterly sales reports and continued unfavorable comparisons to Amazon from Wall Street.”

Elliott Management already owns Waterstones, the largest bookstore chain in the UK. And instead of installing yet another corporate businessman as CEO of B&N, Elliot is putting veteran bookseller James Daunt in charge of saving the chain. The longtime owner and operator of his own successful indie bookstores, Daunt was hired in 2011 as managing director of Waterstones, a “struggling chain, which by that point was both unprofitable and widely perceived as money-grubbing and tacky.” Managing the 280+ stores from the perspective of an indie bookseller, rather than as a corporate moneyman, Daunt turned Waterstones around.

Part of his strategy was to eliminate everything that had made Waterstones generic, soulless, and cookie-cutter. For example, according to an interview in [Quartz](#), Daunt gave each store in the chain “autonomy over their inventory and promotions, so that each location’s offerings could be tailored to the communities it served... Booksellers at individual stores could even set their own prices... Daunt essentially convinced Waterstones to think locally—a reversal of the usual formula for success in big retail stores.”

In other words, he told chain bookstores to operate as if they were local indies. And the strategy worked. In 2016, Waterstones made a profit for the first time in eight years. The following year, profits soared. Then Elliott Management bought the chain in 2018 and told Daunt to keep doing what he was doing. And now, in 2019, Elliott has acquired B&N and put Daunt in charge of this struggling chain, too.

Daunt’s essential strategy for B&N, building on what has worked for Waterstones, is to allow individual stores to curate their inventories and displays, and to update the décor and layouts of the chain’s 600+ locations.

Will this return to its indie bookseller roots save this troubled company that's been around for more than a century? Perhaps—but as one rag [quipped](#), it will be a Daunting task.

Laura Resnick is the author of novels, short stories, and non-fiction.

September 25 - September 29, 2019



The conference schedule is finalized and posted [on the website](#).

We have an entire track for traditional authors this year, and 2019 will be our inaugural Trade Show event, which will give members even more access to industry professionals.

We're looking forward to seeing you on the beach!

Conference FAQs: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/ninc-conference-faq/>

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Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

Networking

The email list for Novelists, Inc. Members: <https://groups.io/g/NINCLINK>

Join our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>

We offer a critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>

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Conference 2019: Planning For Success

Conference information: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

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[2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf](https://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf)

Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> along with other member discounts.

Volunteer

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



Founded in 1989

NINC Statement of Principle

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

Founders

- Rebecca Brandewyne
- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

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2019 Committees

- *Complete committee member listings are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.*
- 2019 Conference Committee:
 - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
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 - Sponsorship: Rochelle Paige
 - Logistics: Karen Fox
 - Registration: Mindy Neff
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Address changes may be made on the website.

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