

Hearts Talk

The official journal of Romance Writers of Australia

Edition #283 | December 2016



Long Way to the Top

Melbourne's **Michelle Somers** won an RWA Romantic Book of the Year award—or Ruby—this year for her 'long romance', *Lethal in Love* (Random House Australia). Michelle's breed of love stories comes with a side order of serial killers and suspense...

Hi, Michelle. How does it feel to win a Ruby for your debut novel? And how many years and manuscripts got you to this point?

AMAZING. Just finalling among such an incredible group of authors was honour enough. But to win...it's a dream come true.

All I've ever wanted to do is write stories that people enjoy. And after years of writing what I thought I should, instead of what I wanted, it seems I've done just that.

Lethal in Love was born after I followed my heart and wrote with passion, not prescription. For years I avoided romantic suspense. I doubted my version of the genre would appeal to the people who make or break a book—the publishers and the readers. And, worse, I doubted my ability to do the genre justice.

Then one day, I just *stopped* and took stock.

I had five complete novels—a mix of category and contemporary romance—and no contract in sight. Most of us are familiar with the 'continue along the same path and



you'll get the same results' adage. Yet it's easier to stay with what we know, rather than change and leap into something new.

It took a while for me to let go of the old ideas and uncertainties and let my story lead me rather than the other way round, but I'm glad I did. Because letting go meant I created *Lethal in Love*. And that choice led me to where I am today.

Aussie female crime fiction has had success of late, with Jane

Harper's *The Dry* and Caroline Overington's *The One Who Got Away*. While the genre's been a tough sell in the past, do you think crime and romantic suspense are on the rise locally?

Crime and romantic suspense have always had a loyal and dedicated following. But I do believe the genres have been undervalued and overlooked by many in the past.

Continued on page 4...



Romance Writers of Australia Inc
PO Box H120
Hurlstone Park NSW 2193
email: info@romanceaustralia.com
phone: 0477 661 549

WEBSITE

www.romanceaustralia.com

BLOG

romanceaustralia.wordpress.com

TWITTER

twitter.com/RWAus

FACEBOOK

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GOODREADS

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www.pinterest.com/RWAus

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RWA COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT – Leisl Leighton
president@romanceaustralia.com

VICE-PRESIDENT –
Lana Pecherczyk & Victoria Purman,
vicepres@romanceaustralia.com

TREASURER – Shelley Findlater
treas@romanceaustralia.com

SECRETARY – Claire Boston
secretary@romanceaustralia.com

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Elise K. Ackers, Imelda Evans, Laura Greaves, Shelagh Merlin, Victoria Purman, Bronwyn Stuart and DB Tait.

RWA CONTACTS

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT – Shannon Curtis, admin@romanceaustralia.com

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR – DB Tait,
volunteers@romanceaustralia.com

WEBMISTRESS – Lana Pecherczyk,
webmistress@romanceaustralia.com

WEBSITE PASSWORDS: To gain access to our members-only section, email passwords@romanceaustralia.com.

MEDIA LIAISON – Laura Greaves,
media@romanceaustralia.com

CONTESTS COORDINATOR – Erica Hayes,
contests@romanceaustralia.com

All deadlines, entry forms and sample scoresheets are at www.romanceaustralia.com. If you have a query about a contest, please email the contest manager for that contest first, then the contest coordinator. All contest managers are volunteers.

JUDGE COORDINATOR – Margaret Midwood, judge-coordinator@romanceaustralia.com

RUBY COORDINATOR –
ruby@romanceaustralia.com

OWL COORDINATOR – Jillian Jones,
owl@romanceaustralia.com

CONFERENCE COORDINATOR –
conference@romanceaustralia.com

ROMAUS e-List Moderator – Imelda Evans
elistmod@romanceaustralia.com

To join our online email group, go to au.groups.yahoo.com/group/romanceaustralia, click on the 'join this group' button and follow the instructions.

SPECIALIST EGROUUPS – We have specialist egroups available on specific romance subgenres: **Erotic Romance, Romantic Suspense, Young Adult, Historical, Paranormal, Blaze and Steampunk.**

MEMBER SERVICES COORDINATOR –
Shelagh Merlin,
members@romanceaustralia.com

NEW MEMBER LIAISON – Janice Bridges,
newmembers@romanceaustralia.com

INDIVIDUAL WRITERS SUPPORT SCHEME –
Nas Dean, iws@romanceaustralia.com

For aspiring and unpublished emerging members. Priority given to those challenged by distance or unable to access creative support by other means. Register for a one-off critique of either 1 or 3 chapters by a published author/advanced unpublished writer.

CRITIQUE PARTNER SCHEME –
Bec Sampson,
applycritpartners@romanceaustralia.com

ASPIRING AUTHOR eLOOP AMBASSADOR –
Dannielle Line,
aspiring@romanceaustralia.com

ASPIRING eLOOP AUTHOR Q&A COORDINATOR –
Julie-Anne Carter,
shanejulianne@gmail.com

ASPIRING eLOOP BIAW COORDINATOR –
Emily Barlow,
emilybarlow.writer@hotmail.com

EMERGING AUTHOR AMBASSADOR –
Karina Coldrick,
emerging@romanceaustralia.com

ESTABLISHED AUTHOR AMBASSADOR –
Rachael Johns,
established@romanceaustralia.com

FACE-TO-FACE GROUPS exist throughout Australia, and for queries on how to join an existing group or start one yourself: Cat Whelan,
groupliaison@romanceaustralia.com

HEARTS TALK TEAM

EDITORS

Carla Caruso (content)
hteditor@romanceaustralia.com
Daniel de Lorne (design)
editor@romanceaustralia.com

MEMBER NEWS

hteditor@romanceaustralia.com

TEAM MEMBERS

Rachel Bailey, Rhyll Biest, Frances Burke, Pam Collings, Renee Conoulty, Anne Gracie, Laura Greaves, Erica Hayes, Sara Hood, Vonnice Hughes, Penelope Janu, Clare Karacsonyi, Moraig Kisler, Stefanie London, Jodie Morphet, KE Osborn Nicole Pfeiffer, Patsy Poppenbeek, Serena Sandrin, Janette Whitehead and Malvina Yock

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Deadline for *Hearts Talk* submissions is the 8th of the month before publication.

From Your Editors

Happy festive season!

To cap off the year, we've got another jam-packed issue. If you're already on holidays in spirit (though your body is not), take a gander at the piece on our new Writers Retreat Program on page 8. Because writing holidays are the best kind, *non*?

And, if you're the type to come up with New Year's resolutions, be motivated to keep reaching for your goals by perusing our interview with Ruby award winner Michelle Somers, plus this month's columns by Anne Gracie and Stefanie London. Lots of words of wisdom!

Meanwhile, seeing as it is a time for gift-giving, we asked some authors how they spoiled themselves when they had writing success. Read on for more...



"For each book I publish or each award I final in, I buy myself a Pandora charm for my bracelet that's related to the book in some way e.g. an emerald one for my Emerald final placing, a cupcake for my novel set in a patisserie, a kangaroo for the book where the hero is a wildlife carer etc. It's a fun way to remind myself of my achievements!"

— **Kerrie Paterson, author of *Return to Jacaranda Avenue* (Escape Publishing)**



"I got a tattoo of my dogs after submitting my non-fiction dog book to Penguin! Also, the hubby is pretty great about bringing home a bottle of Veuve Clicquot (my all-time favourite) for all major writing milestones."

— **Laura Greaves, author of *Incredible Dog Journeys* (Penguin Random House)**

Contents

Long Way to the Top.....4	Member News & Your Thoughts ... 10	Heart of Gold 15
Christmas Message.....5	Subgenre Flirt 11	Books 'n' Bloggers17
Conference Keynote Speaker.....6	Indie World12	Contests 18
Legal Beagle.....7	Work in Progress 13	A Writer's Life..... 19
2017 Writing Retreats Program8	Marketing Questions Answered ... 14	New Releases20

Looking Back

In upcoming issues, we're going to share memories from past presidents and members who've been with RWA since the early days. Here, former president **Amy Andrews** (2009-11) shares a humorous tale from her time on committee.

"I have something funny (although not at the time!) to share that happened at one of the early S&P's [strategy and planning meetings] I attended. This was before I was the prez, my second year on the committee I think. The meeting was in Brisbane this time, and ever mindful of our need to keep costs to a minimum for the organisation, I'd found some budget apartments in Woollongabba that could accommodate us all.

They were nothing flash but they were central and neat and clean. Or so we thought! As per usual, we shared rooms and I shared this time with Kelly Hunter, a room with two single beds. I scratched all night! I figured it was a mozzie or something, even though I was being bitten on my legs under the covers. The next morning I'd discovered that Kelly had scratched all night too. Yes, we'd been attacked by bed bugs! Talk about drawing the short straw..."



Long Way to the Top

Continued from page 1....

That's no longer possible with the rise of some fabulous Australian authors across both genres, authors who have staked a place for Australian crime and romantic suspense on the world stage.

Authors like Helene Young, Bronwyn Parry, DB Tait, Shannon Curtis, Chris Taylor, Jaye Ford, Kathryn Ledson, oh my god, I could just keep on listing and fill this whole page!

It's exciting to watch these genres continue to grow and strengthen in Australia, and I love that, in some small way, my stories can be a part of this process.

Winning an award is no doubt a high point in your writing career. Can you tell us about a low point when you felt like giving up on writing altogether (to inspire those at that point)?

Definitely. I touched on this point above, but let me come at it from a different angle.

I wish I'd stepped into writing with more faith in myself and more courage to follow my passion. I love romance and I love suspense equally. And for as long as I can remember, I've sought out books with either one or both of the genres. It didn't take long to discover there were very few stories with equal mixes of both. I wanted to change that.

But I didn't believe I could. And worse, there were people around me, people I trusted, who helped those self-doubts grow.

I decided to try my hand at writing contemporary romance and received rejection after rejection.

I went through a really dark time, considered throwing everything in because according to those people I trusted, I was 'wasting my time', my writing 'wasn't any good' and I 'wasn't getting anywhere'.

Luckily, my determination outweighed my doubts, and theirs. *Just*.

If not for my husband's support, perhaps things would have been different. Perhaps I would have ditched my dreams of writing. Instead I vowed to prove the doubters wrong. I know it sounds harsh but I cut the negativity from my life, along with the people who fostered it.

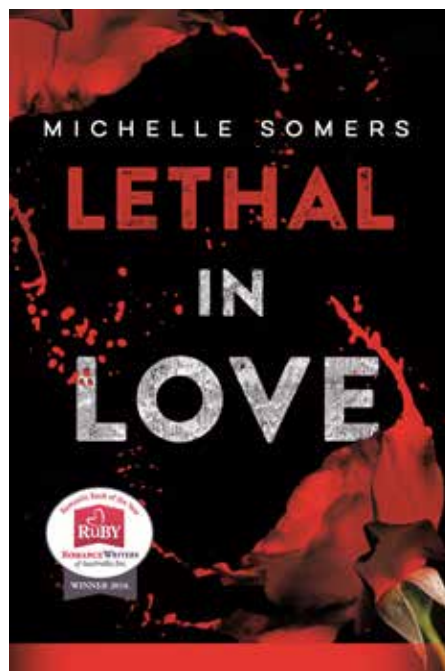
"Lethal in Love was born after I followed my heart."

I found a supportive group of like-minded writers—the Melbourne Romance Writers Guild—threw myself into my writing and wrote what I wanted rather than what I thought I could sell.

And something wonderful happened. I realised passion was my strength, as were the wonderful women I'd surrounded myself with.

That's the long version.

In short, I'll say this: if writing is what you really want, if you can't imagine doing anything else, then surround yourself with a support network, cut the negativity from your life, believe in your ability and worth, and write what you love. Write with passion. And somewhere in that, learn the craft and keep on learning. Because it doesn't matter



how far we've come, we can always go further, climb higher, stretch the boundaries and grow.

And above all, don't short-change yourself. Fill your life with the things you love.

Write.

Lethal in Love began life as a serialised novel, issued in instalments, but has now also been packaged up in the one book. How did readers react to reading the story as a serial?

Reaction was mixed. I guess it's like anything different—there were those who embraced the originality of the serial format and there were those who didn't. Some readers just don't like the idea of waiting for their next instalment.

I get that.

That's why I'm so excited that *Lethal in Love* is now available as a single ebook. It means an entirely new readership will be able to read and enjoy my story. I can't wait to hear what they think.

How is the next 12 months looking for you writing-wise?

Busy! My second book, *Murder Most Unusual*, is due out later this year. For those who've read *Lethal in Love*, this is Chase's story. The premise? *When fact melds with fiction, a sadistic killer is born.*

I'm also working on an anthology of psychological thriller short stories, and some non-fiction how-to books for writers. The first will be on simplifying the synopsis—yes, the bane of most writers' lives, and yet funnily enough I love writing them.

I also have a new series percolating, just waiting to be written. A Stephanie-Plum-meets-James-Bond kind of story, set in Chicago. It's full of suspense and tension, and some weird, wacky and wonderful characters. And more than a few surprises. I can't wait to share more with you when I get started!

www.michelle-somers.com

Christmas Message from RWA's President

This year has passed by so quickly. It has been a year of milestones and turbulent times. RWA reached its 25th anniversary this year and there was a lot to do to help make the conference a true celebration of that. Many of us have reached milestones, from finishing a first book to publishing our 101st.

The publishing landscape has shifted and changed again. Terrorism has become a daily concern for many of us. Public perceptions about politics and how people view themselves and the world have shifted—as I'm writing this, you know who has been elected as the next President of the USA. People are unhappy with the status quo but are afraid of change and the future. And those things are only the tip of the proverbial iceberg in everything that has been going on for the world.

All in all, it's been a big, confusing, turbulent year and the year to come looks no different. The overwhelming feeling I get from the media, social media, family, friends and colleagues is that people are worried. They're losing hope and they don't know what to think about what is to come.

How is this a Christmas message from the President of RWA, I hear you ask?

Well, for me, Christmas is a time for coming together, for overlooking differences (my own family is



made up of lapsed Catholics, non-religious Church of Englanders, almost-atheists and Jews) and finding something to share that brings hope and joy to us all. For me and my family that is the love and friendship we hold for each other; the happy memories we share; the shows, movies, books, jokes and songs we all enjoy, regardless of how different the rest of our lives are. The giving and receiving. The big meal that makes you want an even bigger sleep. Christmas is not a religious time for us, but a time to build on our bonds, to share love and joy, enjoy each other's company and share our hope for the future.

And isn't that what romance writers do? We write about society and bring issues to the fore for our characters to struggle with. But we also write about the bonds that tie the human race together, regardless of race or religion, and the hope for love, joy and prosperity for the future.

So, in this turbulent year, in the unpredictable times that follow, we need to cling to our art and express these necessary and important ideals onto the page and out into the world in the hope that our stories will help us and other people find joy and hope in a moment when we/they need it most.

It's what I get out of reading the books I love—that feeling I get from Christmas that warms my heart and mind—and it's what I hope for my readers. It's also what I wish for all of you.

Whether you celebrate the season or not, I hope you have people in your life you can be with who help to give you hope and laughter and love. I wish you happy writing times in the year to come and most of all I wish you to: *Stay safe. Write large. Express positivity into the world.*

Leisl Leighton
RWA President 2014-2017

**The RWA Office will be closed from 22 December 2016 to 10 January 2017.
Any enquiries will be responded to when business resumes on 11 January.**

Kate Forsyth

by **Jennifer St George** and **Tania Joyce**



Kate Forsyth will be one of our honoured keynote speakers at the #RWAus17 Love Gone Wild conference in Brisbane in August 2017. Kate took some time out from her hectic schedule to have a chat to us about her exciting career and provided an insight into her writing life.

Kate Forsyth wrote her first novel aged seven and has now sold more than a million copies worldwide. Her books weave together history, romance and fairy-tales in unexpected ways.

The Beast's Garden is a retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, set in the underground resistance to Hitler in Nazi Germany. *The Wild Girl* is the story of the forbidden love affair behind the Grimm brothers' fairy-tales. *Bitter Greens* is a sexy and surprising retelling of *Rapunzel*, set in Renaissance Venice. Named one of Australia's Favourite 15 Novelists, Kate has a doctorate in fairy-tale studies and is an accredited master storyteller.

Hi, Kate. When you started writing your first book, what was your goal?

Well, I was only seven so I don't really remember! I think I just wanted to create the magic of all the books I was reading. I knew, however, that I wanted to be published. The title page says 'London—New York—Sydney'. I was very ambitious even at the age of seven!

When did writing become your full-time career? How many books had you published? How did it make you feel?

I really made my living from my writing from the time I finished university, since I worked as a journalist and magazine editor throughout my twenties. My first book was published the year I turned 30, and I've been a full-time novelist since then. I felt just as amazed and blessed as you could possibly imagine. All I'd ever wanted

to do was write and so all my dreams came true.

Where do you get your story ideas?

Each idea has come to me in a different way and so it's impossible to answer this question easily or quickly. One story idea came to me because a raven dropped a feather at my feet. Another idea came to me in dreams, and another because of a ring I saw in a jewellery catalogue. I get ideas for stories nearly every week; I'll never be able to write them all.

What have been the major milestones in your career so far?

My first novel being an international bestseller, which enabled me to write full-time from the very beginning. Having a collection of poems published. Winning five Aurealis awards for my children's historical series, *The Chain of Charms*. Winning a scholarship to undertake a doctorate of creative arts. The international success of my novel, *Bitter Greens* (it has sold more than a quarter of a million copies and won the American Library Association Award for Historical Fiction). Being asked to run a writer's retreat in the Cotswolds every year.

What's your top tip for career success—something all writers should do?

Keep on challenging themselves and striving to do better. Never stop learning.

What's your typical work week like? Do you write every day?

Yes, I do, though not all day every day. My work includes reading,

research, editing, rewriting, teaching, mentoring, answering emails, updating my blog and social media, media interviews, and so on. I do a lot of my reading and researching at night or on the weekends, and I write in my diary most days. I try and have one computer-free day a week.

Are you a plotter or pantsers?

I have a highly intuitive yet highly organised approach to my writing. I like to do a whole lot of daydreaming and doodling and planning and playing before I begin a novel, so that I have a strong sense of character and story and setting and my key turning points before I start. I always need to know my beginning and my ending—that's important to me. I like to write freely and be open to new ideas, and so, my plan will evolve and change as the story grows. Yet my plan will always be there to stop me making mistakes or getting in a muddle.

What is in the pipeline for 2017?

I have a historical novel coming out with Vintage [Penguin Random House] in August, and am working on a secret project with a friend of mine, which may also bear fruit next year. And I'll be planning a new book.

And just for fun, what do you do when you're not writing?

I read, I write poetry, I toil in my garden and I cook feasts for my beloveds.

Workshop Submissions

Don't forget workshop submissions close **31 December, 2016**. Submit your proposals at **form.jotform.com/62357120312948**.

Legal Beagle

by Penelope Janu

The social, ethical and legal issues surrounding assisted reproductive technology (ART) are complex and fascinating. This month's *Legal Beagle* topic is surrogacy arrangements.

In a surrogacy arrangement, a woman (known as the surrogate, or surrogate mother, or birth mother) agrees to carry and give birth to a child on behalf of another person or couple (the commissioning or intended parents).

Developments in ART have made the creation of families through surrogacy arrangements—while unusual—increasingly possible.

All states and territories, except for the Northern Territory, have legislation on surrogacy. This legislation is available through the Austlii link we looked at in the November issue of *Hearts Talk*—austlii.edu.au. But for a straightforward introduction to this area, I suggest you read a recent report published by the Commonwealth Parliament.

It outlines the rights, responsibilities and protections available to parties to surrogacy arrangements. The link is: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/Inquiry_into_surrogacy/Report

Let's consider the law by looking at three scenarios.

Scenario One: Amy is a 32-year-old corporate lawyer who doesn't have the time or inclination to gestate a baby (maybe she's busy, or enjoys red wine, or rigorous gym workouts). Amy and her husband use their own egg and sperm to create an embryo. Lucy, a 20-year-old law student, offers to act as the surrogate mother.

Issues: Amy isn't infertile so she wouldn't qualify as a commissioning

parent in Vic or WA (but this wouldn't disqualify her in some states). In Victoria, the surrogate mother must be at least 25, and have given birth to at least one child (variations to this requirement apply in different states).

Scenario Two: Tom and Jack have been together for two years and want to have a baby. Tom's sister, Tina, a mother-of-two, has offered to carry the baby for them, using her own egg and Jack's sperm.

Issues: A surrogate mother can't use her own eggs in Vic so a donor egg would be required—meaning IVF for Tina. Same-sex couples can't be commissioning parents in SA or WA but this is okay in other states. In the ACT, one commissioning parent in a same-sex relationship must be genetically related to the child.

Scenario Three: April is single, 40, and infertile, but wants to have a child. Anne, who has given birth to her children using IVF, offers to donate a surplus frozen embryo. April puts an advertisement in a magazine, offering to pay a surrogate mother's expenses, and \$20,000 as a 'thank you' present.

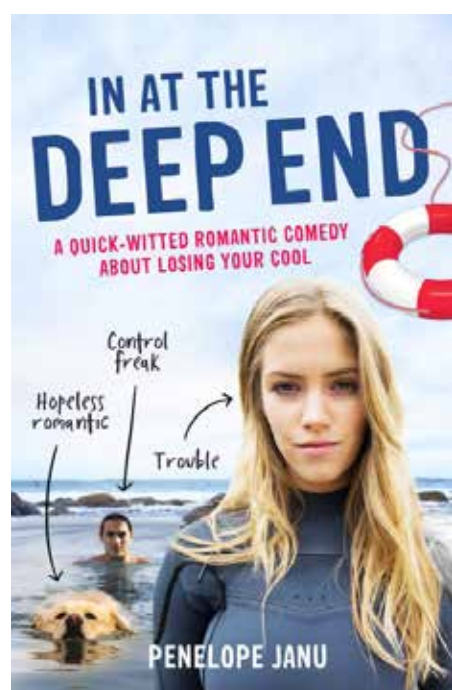
Issues: Commercial surrogacy (involving payments that don't strictly relate to medical, legal, counselling and travel costs) is illegal in every state. April's single status would exclude her from a surrogacy arrangement in NSW and the ACT. Advertising is prohibited in NSW and other states, but allowed in WA.

Counselling and background checks are required in all states, though legislation in these areas is not as strong as it could be.

As in adoption situations, genetic and other information (such as the identity of the birth mother and donors) should be available to children born under surrogacy

arrangements. Under current laws this information isn't, unfortunately, always available. Inconsistencies between the states complicate matters further. Overseas surrogacy arrangements have their own legal and ethical issues—a topic for another column!

Penelope Janu is a legal academic. Harlequin Mira will publish her contemporary romance, *In at the Deep End*, in February 2017. Persuasive and passionate versus cool and calculating—*In at the Deep End* is about taking risks when opposites attract. Please send questions for *Legal Beagle* consideration to penelopejanu@penelopejanu.com or contact Penelope through her website, www.penelopejanu.com. She'd love to hear from you!





RWA's 2017 Writing Retreats Program

by **Elise K. Ackers**

In 2017 RWA will be launching a Writers Retreats Program as part of the Professional Development portfolio. Through various member surveys and informal feedback, the RWA Committee has identified a need for regular low-cost member events to provide craft development, dedicated writing time and member socialisation.

The program will run numerous retreats in all states at various times of year, so members can participate in low-cost events close to home over nominated long weekends, and with minimal to no annual leave requirements. This will develop a more inclusive organisation, give members greater access to services and networking opportunities, and cater to members who wish for additional professional development opportunities outside of the annual conference and current membership offerings.

Proposed Costs

Costs incurred by members will vary. The RWA Professional Development Retreats Team will source cost-efficient accommodation in state capitals and regional cities, and the costs break-downs will be as follows:

- ♥ If the retreat is hosted in an Accor hotel (RWA accommodation partner), members are responsible for paying their own accommodation at a subsidised rate, plus contributing to an equal share in the cost of a meeting room, if applicable. All transport, food and incidental costs will be the responsibility of the member.
- ♥ If the retreat is held in a share house i.e. organised through Stayz or AirBnB, members pay equal share in the rental cost.

- ♥ If there is an appearance fee for a selected workshop convenor or speaker, the members share this cost.

To reduce costs and make the retreats more comfortable/less formal, we're exploring the possibility of Retreat Hosts, members who would host a small group within their home (for writing/meals only, or writing/meals/accommodation). If anyone is familiar with Margie Lawson's Immersion Classes, she does a similar thing. If the retreat is hosted at a member's home, members will contribute an RWA-determined amount to the host. This one-off cost will cover accommodation (if applicable), food and drinks, and incidentals.

Proposed locations

- ♥ State capitals in nominated Accor hotels. If aligning to

state festivals, accommodation will be near identified festival precincts.

- ♥ Regional, more than 100km from state capitals.
- ♥ By agreement with volunteer hosts willing to accommodate members in their homes.

Proposed Agenda/s

The structure of the retreats will be largely dictated by attendees. There will be group meal times but attendance at these will be optional. There can also be craft discussions, unstructured free writing time and writing sprints.

The retreat will be as scheduled or unscheduled as you want it to be—it's a retreat, after all!

Attendees will be contacted ahead of their retreat to determine what they are seeking from the experience.

This is an incredible low-cost opportunity to bring our wonderful members together for highly creative weekends.

More information to follow.



Are you interested in being part of the Retreat Team?

Do you know all the best places? Do you love to talk to people and organise things? Is this Retreat Program so crazy-exciting for you that you want to be involved? I'm looking for some volunteers to help me coordinate this national initiative—and I'd love to have you on board! Email Elise at pd@romanceaustralia.com.

Are you interested in being a Retreat Host?

Do you have a large space for multiple writers or a few empty beds? Maybe you have a sprawling country property with inspiring views, or a lovely suburban property with lots of empty seats at your dining table. Whatever your situation, if you feel you could accommodate a small to medium group of authors, please email retreatinfo@romanceaustralia.com, detailing your accommodation and availability.

Retreat Hosts will be responsible for providing food and drink, accommodation facilities (if applicable), WiFi access (if possible), printer access (if possible) and other incidentals as agreed with RWA. An agreed amount will be collected from attendees and provided to the Host by RWA, so you won't be out of pocket.

Photo by Mikael Tigerström, Welcome 2012 - Flickr.com



Member News

Do you have some good news? Send it to hteditor@romanceaustralia.com.

WA publisher Serenity Press launched *Writing the Dream*, an anthology featuring essays from 24 Australian authors about their writing dreams, in November.

Contributors include RWA members **Anna Jacobs, Tess Woods, Jenn J. McLeod** and **Natasha Lester**.

The stories examine how they achieved their dream, the hurdles they faced, and the tips they have for aspiring writers.

Publisher and editor **Monique Mulligan** said: "This is Serenity Press's biggest project to date and we have worked long and hard to bring this book to life." *Writing the Dream* is available in print and online.

Serenity Press was founded in 2012 by Karen McDermott, who was the

2016 AusMumpreneur Network Excellence winner. In 2016, Monique Mulligan came on board as a co-director of Serenity Press with Karen.

Founded as a vanity press, Serenity has since transformed into a traditional small press, focusing on producing romance novelettes and novellas, children's books and selected other projects, such as anthologies like *Writing the Dream*. It is also running a writing retreat in Ireland in 2017. Monique and Karen are committed to heart-centred quality publishing. For more information, visit www.serenitypress.org.

Some familiar names have appeared on Macquarie Dictionary's new

podcast, *Word for Word*.

In the second episode, the interviewees are fiction editor **Haylee Nash**, who has worked for Pan Macmillan and Harlequin, and **Shannon Curtis**, an acclaimed romance novelist—and RWA's very own administrative assistant! In the interview, the pair discuss writing romance and euphemisms.

Throughout the series, the podcast will explore the surprising histories behind everyday words and phrases, as well as go behind the scenes with the dictionary editors and meet some of Australia's most interesting word-lovers.

More at itunes.apple.com/au/podcast/word-for-word/id1168899965.

Your Thoughts On... Critique Partners

with **Alli Sinclair**, author of *Under The Spanish Stars* (Harlequin Mira)

"When I first started writing, I had friends who read my work and gave me feedback. It was always helpful but as they weren't writers, they approached critiquing from a reader's point of view and when you're starting out, it's invaluable to get feedback from experienced writers.

Six years ago, I met my first critique partner, Heidi Noroozy, on an online mystery writers' message board and we've been critiquing each other's work ever since. Heidi has an amazing eye for pacing, character development and plot, and as she knows my work so well (she's critiqued five of my manuscripts), Heidi understands my strengths and weaknesses. I also critique her work and one of the things I love about Heidi's writing is her lyrical style and fascinating characters. I learn

just as much from critiquing Heidi's work as I do from her critiquing mine.

My brother, Dave Sinclair, is also an excellent critique partner and I have the added benefit that he is also a writer. He is fabulous at the finer details and adding layers to a story, so by having Heidi and Dave critique my work, I get lots of angles covered. Diane Curran and Juliet Madison started out as critique partners. However, over the years, we've all become so busy, our critiquing has tapered off but we still manage some great brainstorming sessions. Their insight into character development and plotting is wonderful.

I also brainstorm a lot with the gorgeous and talented Tina Marie Clark. She often gets frantic messages when I've written myself

into a corner and she calmly talks me through the issue and gets me through to the other side.

I tend to send out my full manuscript to my critique partners and they go through it as a whole, but the last two manuscripts have had very tight deadlines so I've sent through 150 pages at a time, and while they're critiquing, I'm slaving away on the next few chapters.

I honestly wouldn't be where I am without the invaluable help and guidance from my critique partners and I've been super-lucky that these wonderful people have also become some of my dearest friends. There are so many things that should go into a writer's toolbox, and for me, having some critique partners you trust is number one on the list."

allisinclairauthor.wordpress.com

Science Fiction Romance: the Final Frontier

by **Anna Hackett**

I love science fiction romance. This is a subgenre with unlimited possibilities, fantastic worlds, clashes of cultures, and a sense of adventure.

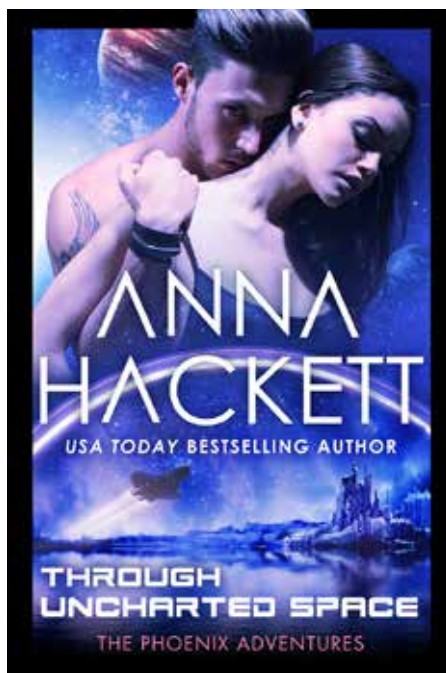
So what exactly is science fiction romance (also called sci-fi romance and SFR)?

It's romance set in a futuristic or imaginative setting, built on science and technology (no magic here!). Now, before the word science has you running for the hills, you'll find many science fiction romances have very accessible science. It can be interesting and fun, quirky or serious, and helps build some fantastic worlds.

Like any good genre, the books you'll find in it cover a broad spectrum. You'll find a fabulous range of settings, tones, characters and tropes. On the romance front, on one side you'll find science fiction with romantic elements (where the romance plays a small part of the story) right through to sexy, erotic sci-fi romance. On the science front, you'll find very light space settings through to heavier science-based world-building.

Sci-fi romances include the very popular alien romances (hunky aliens abducting Earth girls are very popular with readers), space opera romances, near future romances, military sci-fi romances, apocalyptic romances, and even steampunk romances. For heroes and heroines you'll be spoiled for choice by aliens, cyborgs, space-faring humans, galactic treasure hunters, interstellar mercenaries, and so many more. So much SFR goodness to choose from!

The genre has its roots in the work of some wonderful (mostly female)



science fiction authors, and some of the pioneers of science fiction romance include Linnea Sinclair and Susan Grant. In recent years, self-publishing has allowed this little subgenre to flourish and has increased the amazing range of books on offer. Some of the hottest series right now include:

- ♥ S.E. Smith's *Dragon Lords of Valdier* and the *Alliance* series
- ♥ Ruby Dixon's *Ice Planet Barbarians*
- ♥ Eve Langlais' *Cyborgs: More Than Machines*
- ♥ Ruby Lionsdrake's *Mandrake Company* series
- ♥ Fellow Aussie Michelle Diener's *Class 5* series.

There are also lots of Aussie authors writing in this fab genre, and you just have to visit the Darkside Downunder website to check them all out.

So if you'd like to be swept away into

a story with unlimited possibilities or blast off on a galactic adventure with a hunky alien warrior or a sexy space pirate, then pick up a sci-fi romance and strap in for an out-of-this-world ride.

Anna Hackett is a *USA Today* bestselling author of action romance and science fiction romance. She's the author of the bestselling post-apocalyptic sci-fi romance series, *Hell Squad*, and the award-winning space opera series, the *Phoenix Adventures*.

She loves stories that combine the thrill of falling in love with the excitement of action, danger and adventure. She writes about people overcoming unbeatable odds and achieving seemingly impossible goals. Anna offers her mailing list subscribers a free box-set of science fiction romances to try out. Just visit her website to grab your copy.

www.annahackettbooks.com.

Indie World: Kindle Unlimited

by **K E Osborn**

So you've decided to self-publish! Now comes the more difficult task of deciding where to upload your ebooks. There's a broad range of online retailers. There's the obvious one, Amazon. Then there's Apple iBooks, Kobo, Nook, Tolino, Scribd, the list goes on and on. There's also sites out there that can help you upload to most of these places, all at the same time, like Draft2Digital or Smashwords.

But today I'm going to focus on Amazon, and in particular, a platform on Amazon called Kindle Unlimited (KU). This is an option you can select to enrol in when uploading your book (or even at a later date after publication).

So what is Kindle Unlimited?

Basically it's an online lending library for readers. It's a subscription-based service that allows readers unlimited access to ebooks for a fee. For authors, it's a pay-per-page option with authors receiving a nominal payout per page read.

So if we look at the statistics based on payout numbers from April 2016, it would look like this... The payout for a single page read was \$0.00496. So if we put that into scale: for 150 pages read, the max. payout would be \$0.75, and for 300 pages, the author would receive a max payout of \$1.50 and so on and so forth.

Every month there's a global fund for KU and it's shared between all the authors enrolled. Each month, the amounts paid out for pages read changes—some months you receive a higher amount, some months you may receive lower. There is a plus: KU will give bonuses for authors whose books are read the most.

All of my books (excluding some box-sets) are in Kindle Unlimited as I find it brings in a fair proportion of



“Basically it’s an online lending library for readers.”

my total income. Kindle Unlimited works best for me and actually brings in more revenue than ebooks sales for me. But it's not for everyone, there are some downsides.

For example, if you want to hit a bestseller list—*New York Times*, *USA Today* etc.—you won't make it if you're enrolled exclusively in KU. Another is that once you enrol, you're locked in with that book for a 90-day period. And being enrolled in Kindle Unlimited means that you can only sell on Amazon, you can't sell the enrolled book on any other platform (like iBooks etc.). You're

exclusive to Amazon. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing, it's just that you're only selling on one retailer.

But the pros for enrolling in Kindle Unlimited are that the income revenue generation is great. They advertise you, and you have the choice of promotional deals when enrolled, too, such as Kindle Countdown Deals and other free promotional deals as well.

All in all, I am a fan of KU, but I suggest you try it out for yourself. It doesn't work for everyone. I suggest you give it a real go for the 90-day period to see the full benefits.

In next month's column, I will talk about my first time at an author-signing event and what you will need. I look forward to bringing you some more helpful advice.

www.keosbornauthor.com

Work in Progress

by **Stefanie London**

When I was toying with ideas for the name of this column, I wanted something that would encapsulate the idea that while we are working on our craft and our career, we are also working on ourselves.

I like to think that we, as people, are a work in progress.

I'm hoping to mix this column up with advice on writing, on being an author and the business side of things, but also on the mental and emotional aspects of the job.

And, let's face it, being an author can be crazy-stressful at times.

You've got deadlines to deal with, fluctuations in creativity, an ever-changing and overcrowded market, constant critiques of your work, scheduling conflicts...

Have I scared you off yet? No? Good.

Being an author is by far the most rewarding job I've had. But stress management is essential, especially for those of us who put a lot of pressure on ourselves. (Fellow Type-A people, raise your hands!)

Stress is not inherently bad. It can drive you to deliver amazing things.



But stress can also eat away at your concentration and confidence.

It can be a roadblock between you and your goals, if not managed properly.

“We are also working on ourselves.”

My husband is an expert at dealing with crazy, stressed-out Stef. It's not always pretty (okay, it's never pretty), but he gets the job done.

That's why I married him.

He's helped me a lot in dealing with my stress using the following method. It's not a new concept, but it works for me, and hopefully, it will work for you too.

Assessing Your Circle of Control

Stressful factors fall into three categories:

- ♥ Something we can control (e.g. the words we put down on the page)
- ♥ Something we can influence (e.g. how our book sells)
- ♥ Something we cannot control (e.g. what people think of our book).

Good stress (the type that drives and motivates you) usually comes from something that we can control.

For example, if we have a deadline a month away, we can work out how many words a day we need to write to get the book in on time.

Bad stress is caused by worrying about things outside our control. For example, a negative review.

Now it's easy to say 'don't worry about it'. As a perpetual worrywart,

I know saying that is useless.

However, next time you're feeling stressed, look at this list.

We want to focus our energy in the top two groups—things we can control or influence.

In the heat of the moment, it can be tough to think logically. This process helps me to get back into a good headspace if I'm feeling stressed:

- ♥ Remove yourself from the situation if you can. Step away from your computer, get a coffee or go for a walk etc.
- ♥ Have a vent to someone in person or over the phone. People outside the situation can provide a more balanced/unbiased view. Be wary of using social media to vent; the internet remembers everything.
- ♥ Ask yourself if there's anything you can (or should) do about the situation. If so, make a plan. If not, figure out where your energy would be better spent and go do that instead.

Hopefully this helps you the next time you're feeling stressed out!

You've got this, I believe in you.

Stefanie London is a *USA Today* bestselling author, a 2016 Ruby finalist and a self-confessed caffeine addict.

She's currently based in Toronto, but still calls Australia home. (You're welcome for the earworm.)

You can find out more about her sexy contemporary romances by checking out www.stefanie-london.com.

Marketing Questions Answered

by Sara Hood

Q: How do I identify my readers rather than just a mass market? How do I then tailor my marketing specifically to them? If it's Facebook, that's cool, but it might be Instagram if you're writing for teens and readers in their twenties. – Cassandra, Melbourne

A: Oh, I love this question! It's so critical to success. I have taken the liberty of distilling it down to:

- ♥ Who is my audience?
- ♥ Where do they hang out?
- ♥ What do they want to hear from me?

Too many novice marketers jump at every new glittery thing rather than thinking this through and then sticking with it. Knowing who your readers are, or having a plan to find out, is so liberating!

So in the 700 words we have here, these are some tips:

Who is my audience?

Ask them! Use your email and social media. Work out what you want to know and then chop the questions back to no more than five or six, ideally three. The more you ask the less likely people are to participate.

If you're just starting out, you'll have to guess who your audience is to start with and then you can keep testing it by checking and asking. At the end of this article there is a link to some data from Nielsen, the reputable research firm, which was published just over a year ago (from data collected a year before that) about the typical US romance buyer.

That starts to give you some clues to tighten from 'mass market' to 'my market', but bear in mind these are averages. Based on this, you'd not know there was a thriving erotic sector, apart from a brief mention of *Fifty Shades*. Your audience will be *your* audience and not an average audience.

Where do they hang out?

Again, ask them what their favourite social media site is. Or even if they use social media at

all. Don't be dismayed if you get a wide response. Pick the two biggest options and focus your marketing on them. As you say, you can't try to reach everyone.

You're spot-on in thinking it's good to focus. If you're just starting out and haven't got many readers yet to ask, there's also a lot of information out there about who uses which sites, but bear in mind that, again, the data is largely averages and it doesn't tell you what they are using each site for.

Snapchat, for example, is huge with teens, and they love it because it's so transient, there are very few brands there, and parents can't 'snoop' like they can on Facebook. Twitter is malingering, tarnished by the perception that the smallest slip will see you consumed by trolls, but it still has value for 'in the moment' communication. Facebook now has just under 1.8 billion accounts. It has to be a good place to start. Instagram is fast-developing as the place for the visually-oriented, but you must have great pics to use it.

Yes, the data will show teens are also on Facebook, but anecdotally, it's to organise parties more than anything else. If you want to reach teens, you have to be very, very creative.

What do they want to hear from me?

There ain't no hard-and-fast rules, sadly. You have to just try it. Subscribe to the newsletters from established and savvy writers who you think are also read by your readers, follow them on Facebook and other social media. See what they post and how often. Don't copy but use that to inspire and

inform what you do. Look at your analytics to see what got opened, what got likes or comments, or retweets or regrammed. Then refine and press on.

Probably not the definitive answer you were looking for, Cassandra, but I hope that gives you a plan.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

That's it from me for the year, but before I go it would be remiss of me not to wish you all a very merry, happy and safe Christmas. May lots of readers buy your books and thoroughly enjoy them! Thanks for the kind words from people who have read this page over the months and see you all next year!

Link to Nielsen research: www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2015/literary-liaisons-whos-reading-romance-books.html

Have a marketing question? Send it through to sara@marketing4writers.net. Sara Hood has more than 30 years' experience in marketing and marketing communications. She can be found at www.marketing4writers.net.



Heart of Gold

Melbourne's **Gabrielle Luthy** was the only Aussie to win an award at the Romance Writers of America conference this year; that being a Golden Heart.

Hi, Gabrielle. How did it feel to win a Golden Heart award for your unpublished manuscript, *Shelter Me*, in the contemporary romance category? The only Aussie win in America this year?

Surreal, followed closely by awesome. RWAmerica leaves nothing to chance, so all the GH finalists had gone to a rehearsal earlier that day and were told what we could expect and what would be expected of us. I honestly didn't expect to win, so when they said my name, I think I looked at my friends and said, "Oh, ****, I just won a Golden Heart!", then had to go up and accept the award.

I'm very grateful I didn't either swear or fall down the stairs and that I remembered everything I wanted to say—because even though I'd jotted down some bullet-points, I completely forgot to look at them and later saw a photo of myself waving them around as I spoke.

I made it through all the expected stuff (*walk up these steps, don't stand too close to the microphone, walk down these steps, go backstage to have your photo taken*), and then I was on my own. I was still in a daze when Sylvia Day stopped me to congratulate me.

Then my fellow finalist and friend of 20 years, Tracey Amey, grabbed me and we were crying. It was really a joy to share that night with her, because we all know how hard writing can be and how important it is to have good peeps in your corner. More people stopped me to congratulate me—some I'd met just that week, others I'd known as long as I'd known Tracey. The goodwill in the room is something I'll hold onto for the rest of my life.

How was the Romance Writers of America conference?



I couldn't go to the 2010 conference (my first GH final), so I was determined not to miss this party. I was very focused, I knew exactly what I wanted out of the conference. I went to only a few workshops, concentrating instead on the relationship-building and working out where I fit in the market. (Since most sessions are recorded, I can catch up on them later. One that *wasn't* recorded was the Golden Network retreat, at which Damon Suede and Heidi Cullinan presented their branding workshop. I highly recommend checking out their book, *Your A-Game*, and the companion website your-a-game.com.)

Being a Golden Heart finalist also means people—many you don't know—stopping you to wish you luck, which is very humbling and touching. Then there's the chance to catch up with the other friends you don't get to see often enough. But by far the best part of the conference for me was the time spent with my fellow finalists. There were about 47 finalists this year

(our group is called the Mermaids) and over 30 made it to San Diego.

We spent a lot of time at the poolside Tequila Bar, strategising, practicing our pitches, and just getting to know each other and relax.

They're an amazing group of women, so generous and knowledgeable, and several of them (Sarah Hall, Meg Kassel, Alyson McLayne, Evie Anderson and McCall Hoyle amongst them) have either sold or released books since becoming finalists. Others have signed with agents, and I expect to hear more sales news any day now.

Tell us more about your winning manuscript, *Shelter Me*.

Katie Velásquez needs to get her life in order. With her credit in the toilet after her sister steals her identity, she heads to New York's Shelter Island, and the one person she thinks will give her a job without asking questions: investment banker Campbell MacGregor, the man for whom, seven years earlier, she acted as a surrogate mother.

Campbell isn't happy to find Katie on his doorstep, especially since she's violating their no-contact agreement. But he knows his late wife would kick his arse if he didn't help the woman who gave them a child, so agrees to hire her for the summer. He can count on more fingers than he's got the reasons why they shouldn't become involved: they're from different worlds, she's much younger than him, and, even though he won't admit it, he's not ready to risk love again. But the heart wants what the heart wants. Katie's bringing light back into his and his son's lives while she dares to dream that she deserves more than her family of origin.

They're finally starting to feel this relationship might work. But what neither of them knows is that Campbell's trusted finance guy has got wind of Katie's debts, and from the moment she arrived, he's been setting her up to take the fall for his embezzling. With everything crumbling around her, Katie has to stop hiding, stand up for herself and fight for the man—and the child—she loves.

Have agents or editors bombarded you for a look at the manuscript since? Or are you sending it around?

A combination. I've had cold requests (including one of the final GH judges—anonymous, which for some reason makes it more nerve-wracking), as well as editor and agent pitches in San Diego. So the full manuscript is out with several people. I also heard while I was in the US that *Shelter Me* finalled in the Women's Fiction Writers Association Rising Star contest, which means it's gone to five top agents, all of whom I'd be interested in working with.

On your website it says you're a 'former Parisienne'. What took you to Paris, and what do you do when not writing now?

I fell in love with Paris the first time I visited in 2000. So in 2004, I packed up my two cats and headed off. I worked for the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) for five years, which had perks such as diplomatic rations (cheap perfume and champagne!) and its own chateau.

My office was in a different building, the former home of the Monaco Royal family, with Jacqueline Kennedy's sister living across the street. It was a completely foreign world in more ways than one, and great for writing, for the knowledge and perspective it gave me. Plus, I lived in a tiny apartment at the

top of Montmartre, surrounded by the one-time homes of van Gogh, Renoir, Picasso, Degas, Dali (etc, etc!) with a view of the Eiffel Tower and the windmills. Very inspiring.

Now I work for a tech company, while plotting my great escape to Topanga Canyon (a wild hippie town in the hills of Los Angeles) in the next two to three years. I'm working on several business ventures to help get me there, and recently met with some clients in California. My plan is to write and sell books, work on these other businesses, and whatever else might come along. This is the perfect time to be a lady boss.

What are you working on next?

I'm revising *The Lake Effect*, my 2010 Golden Heart entry, as well as working on my next manuscript. *Above Sunset* is the story of Daisy, a Hollywood party girl who, after finding out her brother was murdered, decides to exact revenge on his killers, and Will, the man desperately trying to stop Daisy from getting herself killed in the process. This is a little darker than anything I've worked on, but also a lot of fun—including 'research' at the Chateau Marmont, which pretty much consisted of trying not to stare too hard at Keanu Reeves as he lolled about on a sofa. God, I love being a writer!



Gabrielle Luthy, centre, with fellow finalists Tracy Brody and Brooke Salisbury in the US.

Books 'n' Bloggers

by **Renee Conoulty**

Each year I participate in the Goodreads Reading Challenge.

This year, my challenge was a bit different from the previous years. In 2014, I set a goal of 100 books for the year and blew it out of the water by reading 209. In 2015, I set myself a goal of 200 books to beat; I read 285.

All this reading is great for reviews

for my blog, but once I started writing my own novel [*Don't Mean a Thing*, Kindred Ink Press], something had to give. I'd already cut right back on TV. So at the beginning of 2016, I stepped down as a moderator of one of the top 20 most popular Goodreads groups and decided to cut back on my reading.

All the writing advice I heard was that to be a better writer, you

need to read widely and read lots. I figured if I cut my reading in half, I still met that criteria. So I decided to post half as many book reviews and set an upper limit of books to read instead of a line to cross.

So far I'm coming in under my reading limit for the year. Do you set reading goals?

heysaidrenee.blogspot.com.au

Book Spotlight

Romancing the Beat—Story Structure for Romance Novels

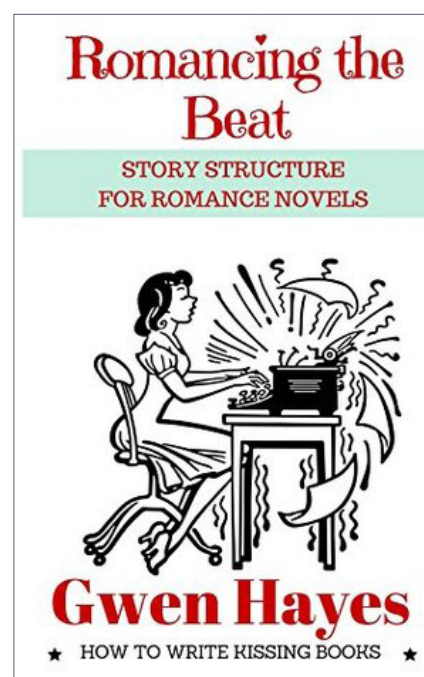
by **Gwen Hayes**

I've been devouring writing craft books lately. I probably should've read them before I started writing, but better late than never. This one struck a chord with me.

I'd heard about 'beats' when it comes to writing but never really understood them. This book demonstrates how you can apply them to a romance novel.

There are lots of great examples and plenty of '80s music references. It's entertaining and educational.

This book and *GMC: Goal, Motivation and Conflict* by Debra Dixon have been my favourite writing reference books so far.



Blogger in Focus

Kat Mayo of Book Thingo, bookthingo.com.au

What genre do you review?

Mostly romance, with the occasional foray into other genres.

Do you accept review requests?

Yes. The number of requests we receive far exceed our ability to read and review in any given month, though, so please bear that in mind. For any requests I receive, the first question I'll always ask is: does this book have a happy ending?

When did you start blogging?

Book Thingo started in 2008 with

one goal: to get a *Black Dagger Brotherhood* ARC [advanced review copy]! That sounds mercenary, but we didn't have NetGalley at the time and it was a challenge even to get a copy of the book on release day. (Plus, my co-bloggers and I didn't think we would actually ever achieve this goal.)

I did have a broader idea of what I wanted the blog to be, but that has also changed over the years. This year, the focus has been on using our podcast to explore aspects of the genre that are difficult to

contain in a blog post. I have also tried to review more self-published books by new-to-me authors and to look for guest contributors who can offer different perspectives. Next year, I think we'll be playing around with the podcast a little more, and I'd like to start reviewing works on interactive platforms such as Wattpad.

I'd love to feature more opinion pieces that look at romance fiction from different angles, but they take so much longer to write. (That said, we're definitely open to guest posts!)

Ruby Update

Some news about the 2017 Ruby, our contest for books published in 2016.

New Sections

This year, we'll be reducing the number of sections to four. Entry numbers in the Short Sexy and Short Sweet sections have reduced enough for these to be combined, to make four roughly even sections.

The 2017 sections will be: Long Romance, Short Romance, Romance Novella and Romantic Elements.

If you're unsure of your book's category, check the Ruby rules/conditions on the website.

New Judging

For the first time, we'll be presenting an overall Romantic Book of the Year award, judged by a panel of industry experts.

Here's how it'll work:

- ♥ First round judging will run as usual (but see below!)
- ♥ The finalists and winners for each section will be decided and announced in the usual way
- ♥ All finalists will be read by our industry panel, who will select one overall winner (in addition to the section winners).

Who are the industry judges? Watch the blog for an announcement soon.

More New Judging

We'll also be introducing writer judges to the Ruby.

Our reader judges do a wonderful job and keep the contest market-relevant, but we believe RWA members have a lot to offer as judges too—and we're keen to keep judge demographics as diverse and inclusive as we can so all subgenres and styles are catered for.

To this end, every entrant will be judging one or two books, taken from a section they haven't entered.

Information about the judging procedure will be provided when you enter. It's easy and fun—you might discover a new favourite!

New Entry Formats

Digital entries make the contest process faster, more cost-effective and easier for judges. So if your book has a DRM-free digital edition (.pdf, .epub or .mobi), you'll be entering that.

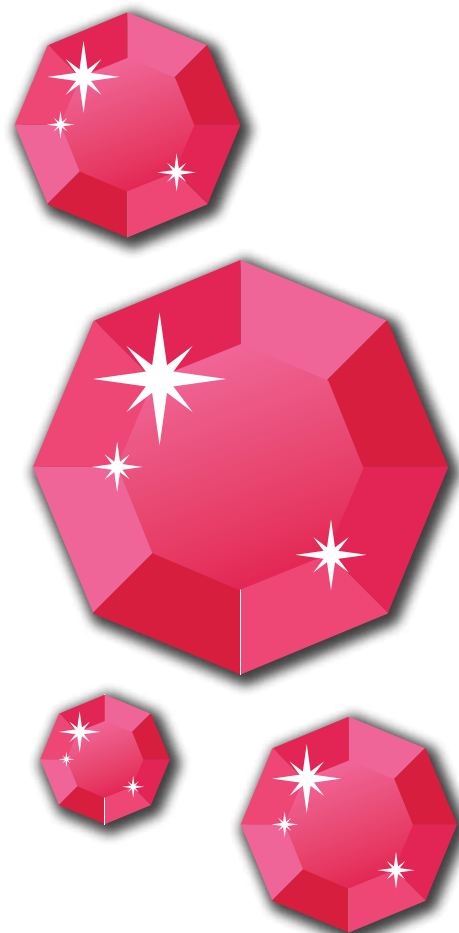
Print entries will be accepted only from those authors who don't have access to a usable digital edition.

As for last year, you'll be entering online. There's a limit of three entries per person (that's per human being, not per pseudonym) in any section/s you like.

New Dates

To accommodate the extra judging, we're opening and closing for entries *earlier* than before.

Remember—if you're entering print copies (see above) your books must be *postmarked* by the closing date.



Opening: 16 December 2016

Closing: 16 January 2017

Full rules/conditions will be available on the RWA website—please read them carefully—but as always, contact the contest managers with any queries regarding the contest rules or entry process.

If you have special difficulties, we can make arrangements—don't be afraid to ask!

Dates for 2017 Contest Season

Little Gems & Spicy Bites

Opens 9 January 2017
Closes 27 January 2017

First Kiss

Opens 6 February 2017
Closes 27 February 2017

Valerie Parv Award

April 2017

Invidious Comparisons

by Anne Gracie

December is often a month where we sit down to take stock of what we've achieved in the year, and while some of us are celebrating, a lot more of us are contemplating our figures gloomily and wondering whether it's all worth it.

One of the things that can poison our joy in writing is constantly comparing ourselves to others. Someone else got a contract from your dream publisher and you've read their writing and it's not nearly as good as yours, so, 'Why?' We compare our Amazon figures, and ask, 'Why?' Why has their book got so many reviews and yours hasn't? Why are their numbers so much better?

It's inevitable that we will compare ourselves to others, but it's pointless. It's negative and self-destructive and we should try not to do it. All it will do is make you feel bad.

A thousand things go into making a book a success, and the writing is, sadly, only part of it—an important part, admittedly, but so many other things go into making a book a commercial success.

In traditional publishing the editor who picks up your manuscript is crucial. If it excites them, if they think it will make a splash, they'll buy it. Then, if they can excite marketing—and that's a big *if*—the publisher will get behind it, and the book will be widely promoted and sent out in such numbers as to make success inevitable. Publishers can create bestsellers.

Another editor in the same house might turn down the same book. Or read it and think it's 'viable' and publish it in small numbers and to no fanfare at all. Lots of publishers follow the spaghetti model—throw it at the wall and see if it sticks.

A big part of what traditional publishers do is getting books to readers—the physical distribution of books to bookstores. In digital publishing, we chase reviews and blog and put out newsletters and post on social media; it's all about visibility.

Still, why does one book whizz to the top of the list when another, better-written and on a similar topic languishes? Nobody knows. A combination of luck, timing, a review in the right place at the right time—it's a mystery. One book simply hit 'the spot' with readers, and the other didn't. And success begets success.

Face it, there will always be another author you know who is doing better than you, making more money, getting better reviews and hitting bigger bestseller lists. Constantly comparing yourself to others will only bring you down, will only poison your joy in writing and sap your writing energy.

Besides, success isn't always obvious. Let me tell you about an author I know. Let us call her Jane.

Jane loved writing. Her first two books were rejected. Five years later, she sold her first book for an embarrassingly small advance. It did nothing, sank into obscurity. Nine years later, after a substantial rewrite, she sold it to another publisher. This time it sold 500 copies. She kept writing, sold three more books, had some good reviews and considered herself a modest success. But after four years on the market, her fourth book was pulped. Of the 2,000 that were printed only 563 had sold. And 10 years after her first book was published, her books were out of print.

A failure, right? At least she had a go, and kept trying. But still, she

was a failure, wouldn't you agree? Probably not a very good writer.

Her name, dear reader, was Jane Austen.

Now I'm not suggesting you'll have to wait until you're dead before your books take off, but I am pointing out that quality writing doesn't necessarily bring instant success, and that all kinds of factors go into making a book a commercial success—factors that are mostly out of the writer's control.

I am suggesting that the more you write, and the more you publish, the greater chance you will have of finding readers, and readers beget more readers, and inevitably your readership and sales will build. Publishing is a long game.

So don't poison your muse with invidious comparisons—concentrate on your writing. Write joyously and with zest, build your worlds, bring your characters to life and tell the very best stories you can. Bring joy to your readers, make them laugh, make them cry, make them worry and make them wait. That's what really counts in this business.

Anne Gracie



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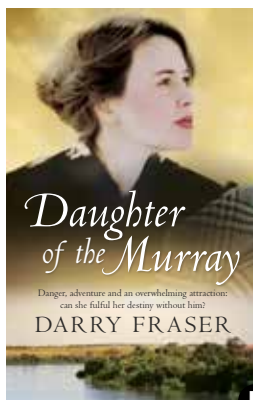
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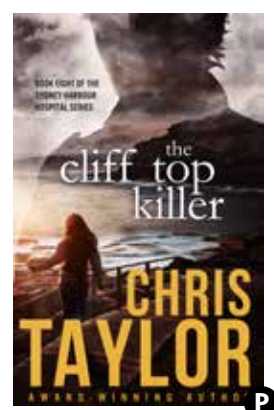
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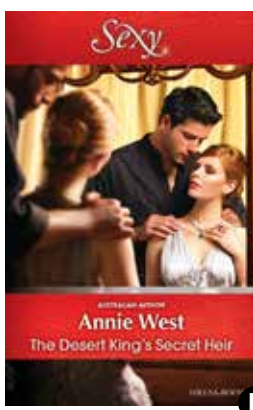
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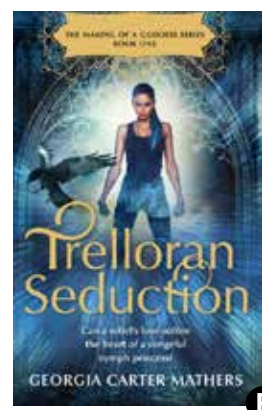
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