

How To Write A Kick Ass Heroine

Jackie Ashenden



Okay, last month we covered how to write an alpha hero without making him an alpha-hole. Now let's take a look at our heroine.

Writing heroines can be a tricky business, mainly because readers tend to be very hard on our ladies.

A hero can get away with a lot, but not, unfortunately the heroine.

Why? Because for a lot of readers the heroine is their stand-in and the gateway to the hero. They put themselves in her place when they read and tend to judge her as harshly as they judge themselves. A snarky heroine can come across as 'mean' and an ambitious heroine can be 'cold'. And woe betide you if you write an angry heroine.

But does this mean you should only write doormats? No, of course not. As with writing a good hero, the key to writing a sympathetic yet strong heroine is all about making her a real person rather than a collection of traits. If the heroine is snarky purely because you want her to be 'strong' then yes, she *will* come across as mean. If she is ambitious because that's what all professionals are, then yes, she *will* come across as cold. And if you make a heroine angry for no good reason, then she'll definitely come across as petulant.

Like the hero, a heroine needs motivation for her actions. For example, slapping the hero for giving her a punishing kiss because 'that's what heroines do', is not motivation. Slapping the hero because he didn't listen to her when she asked him to stop, and all her life people have never listened to her and she's finally had enough, is motivation. Being snarky to keep people at a distance so she never has to be hurt the way she was hurt when she was a kid, is motivation. Being ambitious to get ahead so

she'll never have to return to the trailer park where she grew up, is motivation.

Character backstory is vital for motivation and it is motivation that will keep the heroine sympathetic to readers.

Here are a few tips to get you started on your heroine's journey:

1. If you're writing a strong, angry, snarky heroine, the key to making her resonate with readers is vulnerability. You don't need much, just a hint that there is someone caring and emotional under her armor. If you don't give your heroine any vulnerability at all, then she will come across as cold or grating and readers won't find her sympathetic.
2. The heroine needs to balance out the hero and challenge him. I tend to find that the stronger the hero, the stronger the heroine needs to be in order to keep him on his toes.
3. A strong heroine does not mean she has to argue with the hero all the time (or anyone else) or protest about every little thing. That's just annoying and you risk making the heroine come across as being TSTL (too stupid to live). If she is fighting the hero then she needs a reason other than simply because she 'doesn't like being told what to do' (because let's face it, who does like being told what to do??). If you don't know why she doesn't like that, then you need to think about her character and backstory more, and give her a reason.
4. A heroine who is caring and puts others before herself can come across as a martyr or a bit of a doormat. So, just as you give the strong, snarky heroine vulnerability, you need to give the caring heroine moments of strength, where she does stick up for herself and show her backbone. Again though, these moments have to be driven by the character and not just 'she needs to show she is strong so here she is being strong'. How does she show her strength? Why does she show it? And what is it about this moment that makes her stick up for herself? Again, the answer will be in her backstory and in her character.

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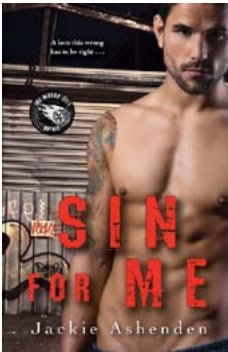
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5. This is not to say that you can't write an 'unlikeable' heroine or a heroine who flouts the conventions, but you either have to do a lot of groundwork to connect her to readers, or you accept that you will get reader pushback. No, it shouldn't have to be that way, but sadly that's the reality of readers. On the upside, there will be some readers who do enjoy a different sort of heroine.

6. Some genres are more forgiving of kick-ass heroines—UF (Urban Fantasy) heroines for example, are pretty much expected to be snarky, while sweet contemporary readers go for heroines who are on the softer/sweeter side too.

Mainly though, the trick to writing a good heroine is to treat her as a person and not simply a cardboard cut-out. Give her a good backstory, one that provides good reasons for what she does and the decisions she makes, and you'll find yourself not only creating a sympathetic heroine, but a strong one too.

Happy heroine-ing!



Jackie Ashenden loves to write dark, emotional stories with alpha heroes who've just got the world to their liking only to have it blown wide apart by their kick-ass heroines. When she's not torturing alpha males and their stropky heroines, Jackie can be found drinking chocolate martinis, reading anything she can lay her hands on, posting random crap on her blog, or being forced to go mountain biking with her husband. Jackie can be found at jackieashenden.com

RWNZ Contests Updates

The **Chapter Short Story Contest**, sponsored by Chapter Book and Tea Shop, opens for entry on 1 April. The contest is for a contemporary romance short story of 1800 words, by computer count, including any chapter headings or section divisions, etc. Entries may include a wide variety of themes, such as mystery, humour, relationships and family issues, with warmth an important factor. All stories must contain a romantic thread or element. Entries close on 30 April. See the website for more information.

The **Koru Award** opens for entry on 1 May. The Koru is FULL BOOK readers' choice award aimed at recognising excellence in romance writing. It is open to **all** published authors, not only to members of the Romance Writers of New Zealand. Entry is a published book, in one of three categories: short and sexy, short and sweet, and long. Authors entering a first published book in any category can also enter the best first book category. See the website for more information.

"We are all the heroes and heroines of our own lives. Our love stories are amazingly romantic; our losses and betrayals and disappointments are gigantic in our own minds."

— Maeve Binchy

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Heart to Heart will be published in the first week of each month except January. The deadline for every issue is the 20th of the month prior (e.g. 20th August for September issue). Please have all articles, news, reports, and advertising to Gracie at heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz on or before the deadline.

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Writing The Heroine From A Male Perspective

Darian Smith



When I first decided to write *Currents of Change* and knew it was going to be from the heroine's perspective, it was a little daunting.

Sara is very different to me in a number of ways. As a male, trying to tell a story as a woman character when you know the majority of the book's readers will have better knowledge of what it's like to be a woman than you do, can be scary!

Today's audience has an expectation that you should actually do a decent job of this. There's a demand for fair representation in literature and movies, as well as tools like the Bechdel Test (Do women speak to each other about anything other than the man?) for assessing whether a female character has been done "right". As an author, I need to be able to create characters that readers can believe in and really get to know ... and there's a school of thought that says you can't truly know what it's like to be a woman if you are, in fact, a man.

Of course, as writers, we are ALWAYS writing characters who are other than ourselves. That's part of the point. It would be boring if all my characters were carbon copies of me—lovely as I might be. We use imagination to put ourselves and our readers into another person's shoes. Why should it matter if those shoes have high heels?

Well, the trouble is, men haven't always been that great at it, historically speaking. There's a reason the Bechdel Test exists. Writers (okay, mostly male writers) have often fallen into the trap of using stereotypes, archetypes, and flat out one dimensional fantasies when it comes to their heroines. Stereotypes are easy to come by. The Damsel in Distress and the Hero's Pretty Accessory have featured in more than a few books and movies. There are the female archetypes of Maiden, Mother, and Crone, not to mention the early church's charming categorisations of women as one of two Marys: Virgin or Whore. Defaulting to one of them and not bothering to develop it further seems to have been a temptation for a lot of male writers over the years.

Which isn't to say there aren't examples that break those molds. There are. Many of them ground-breaking. Heroines like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* set a trend for "Strong Female Characters"—often feisty women who don't take crap from anyone. Joss Whedon, the male writer of

Buffy, quite famously responded to the question of why he writes strong female characters by saying, "Because you're still asking me that."

So writing a heroine who has strength seems a good recipe for success. However, if that's your only criteria when writing your heroine, you run the risk of swinging to the other end of the pendulum and creating an equally stereotypical macho character whose only concession to womanhood is a penis deficiency.

But here's the beautiful thing: the world is half full of people without penises. And I can talk to them about their experiences and learn from that how to make my female characters seem real.

Crazy, isn't it? Who would have thought? It turns out that characters of other genders, ethnicities, sexualities, etc., are all people too! And as such, they come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and personalities. They are a mix of strengths and vulnerabilities and it is that mix that makes the character interesting.

So the trick to writing a character like that is to understand the mix. To find out the ways we are the same and balance those with the ways we are different.

For me, my wife is a huge female presence in my life. When I was creating my heroines, particularly the heroine for *Currents of Change*, I drew from our experiences together. The experience of miscarriage was a defining one in our lives for many years. While it impacts greatly on the male partner in a couple, the physical presence of it in a woman's body makes it a visceral and uniquely female experience with a set of emotions and responses common to those who go through it. This became part Sara's character and developed into the motivating force she needed to leave her abusive partner. But it was not the **only** element of her character.

For *Kalanon's Rising*, I wanted to ensure that, despite its apparently traditional fantasy setting, the female characters weren't helpless cut-outs. They face issues that connect to their femininity, such as motherhood, but they are a complex mix of those and other qualities and they are strong protagonists who move the story with their actions.

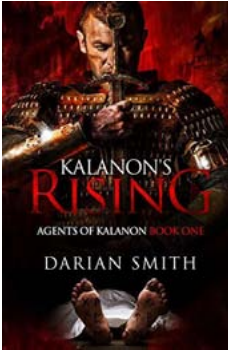
I've always enjoyed heroines who demonstrate self-agency in the story. Sara rescues herself in the end of *Currents of Change* and, in *Kalanon's Rising*, it is

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choosing to put her faith in the wrong male character is the downfall of one of the heroines.

So in the end, it seems that writing a female character isn't so scary after all ... as long as I don't take the lazy way out. Which, let's be honest, is true of anyone writing any character. It all comes down to doing the research to find out what makes them unique, giving them as much humanity I can, and hoping readers love them as much as I do!



Darian Smith writes mainly speculative fiction (fantasy) and lives in Auckland, New Zealand with his wife (who also writes) and their Siamese cat (who doesn't). He holds two Koru Awards, is the winner of the SpecFicNZ/Steam Press manuscript competition, and has been a finalist for the Sir Julius Vogel Awards several times.

From The Editor



Last year I spent my March birthday week in hospital. I was looking forward to a better one this year.

Unfortunately, my mother had a small stroke on Sunday and was hospitalised. On the upside, she's alive, as feisty as ever, and my entire family gathered together for comfort and support. On the downside, she's lost more of her sight, some cognitive function, and small motor skills.

Bear with me here, I do have a point.

Grief doesn't wait until someone dies and then punch you in the face. It sidles into your life while those you love are still breathing, while you watch them sleep, as they struggle for words, for control, for stability.

It brings frustration—with yourself, with those around you, with the person you love.

It brings tears.

It brings anger.

If you're a member of my family, it brings completely inappropriate black humour.

"Now remember," Mum says loudly in the middle of the Emergency Department. "I don't want the lid on my coffin for a week after I go in. I want to make sure I'm dead first. I want to stink."

"Fine," one of my sisters says. "We'll give you a bell like the Victorians used to do. Ring it and we'll come and haul you out."

"But you won't need it," my other sister says. "We'll make sure you're dead first, won't we, Gracie."

"You bet," I say.

And realise I sound like a hit woman.

My niece laughs. Both my sisters grin at me. My husband rolls his eyes.

Then Mum says, absolutely straight-faced, "Good. And when I'm really dead, bury me with your father. I've always wanted to be on top."

We—and half the Emergency Department—cracked up.

So here's my point.

You're a writer. Real life is a writer's incubator. It's emotion. It's pain. It's love and grief and laughter. But even in the bad times, real life gifts you with stories and memories that will last long after those who crafted them are gone.

Write them down. Pass them on.

Gracie

Woos & Hoos



Kris Pearson's second Italian translation has just been published by Babelcube and is making its way into the E-stores. Christmas Holiday Hearts has become **UN CUORE RITROVATO**.

"Find out what your hero or heroine wants, and when he or she wakes up in the morning, just follow him or her all day."

— Ray Bradbury

Why? Why? Why?

Daphne Clair de Jong



Whether a plotter or a pantster, at some stage every writer needs to answer the hard question. “Why?”

Why?

It's called *motivation*, and it's important, because readers who don't understand why a character is doing what they do will not be satisfied.

If your hero is the classic hard businessman apparently without a heart, but softens toward dogs and children, why can't he believe the heroine isn't after his money? One failed past love affair is hardly enough to sour him for life. But, several? That points to something deeper making him commitment-shy. So why?

His mother left his father for a richer man when the hero was at a vulnerable age? His determination to make more and more money may be rooted in insecurity? Or his father wed a string of trophy wives, engraining his subconscious with a cynical view of marriage. Or ... Dad ruthlessly taught him that business as the only way to be successful in life.

The heroine believes all businessmen are corrupt, or at least uncaring, and is repelled by wealth to the point of prejudice. Why? Her family of kind, caring and generous people was bankrupted by a big corporate, and struggled to survive. Now she works hard for a charity. She is as impulsive as the hero is wary.

Put those two together and watch the fireworks. Whether it's written down or it gradually emerges from the process of writing, it isn't yet a plot, merely an idea, funny or fanciful, touching or tragic. But all fiction writers need to pay attention to the interior logic of their story.

Unlike real life, what fictional characters do, say or think, everything that happens to them, must have a reason.

A planner might know the reason for every plot step, while pantsters often start with a single idea, perhaps a setting, character or incident. But even planners sometimes find a brick wall where their characters or plot stall or turn in a different direction, enticing the story from its path.

Pantsters are likely to get excited and run with it. Planners may get frustrated and wrench the story back on the road.

Before making a decision, ask, Why? Why would the character do that? Why would that event happen, that person appear? Is your subconscious nudging you toward a better story? Or are you getting bored, and need a new stimulus. (If I'm bored, what about my readers?)

Has the character or storyline changed from your initial vision? Why? For better or worse? Will this new turn make the story more interesting? Why? Will it add something important to character, tension, plot? If so—how? And—most important—how will it affect your main characters and their story? Why?

If a character refuses to do what you want, congratulations, she or he is alive. If a scene isn't working, ask, would that person do/say that?

No? What would they do? Ask.

Why won't you...?

Why do you feel that way?

Why is it important to you?



Daphne Clair has written over seventy-five romance novels for Harlequin lines. As Daphne de Jong she has published many short stories and a historical novel, both critically acclaimed in her homeland. She has won the prestigious Katherine Mansfield Short Story Award, has been a Rita finalist and has either finished or won in other contests in several writing fields. To learn more about Daphne visit <http://www.harlequin.com/author.html?authorid=920>

Middle Grade Heroines

Amanda Ashby



Welcome to the world of a middle grade heroine!

These girls sure know how to have fun, whether they're out riding horses, sneaking into the school after it's closed or putting fart powder in their annoying brother's socks, the one thing they all have in

common is that they are keen for adventure and aren't scared to take action!

Middle grade books are roughly aimed at children from nine to twelve and are the gateway between Chapter/Junior books and the YA/Teen section. In New Zealand it's probably easiest to think of them as books for Intermediate aged kids (though obviously reading levels at this age vary a lot). Middle grade books aren't a genre in themselves but rather a collection that includes everything from contemporary, fantasy, paranormal, historical through to novels with graphic elements.

The other thing that makes middle grade fiction different is that while kids often know what they want to read, the choice isn't entirely theirs. At this age their parents, teachers and even school librarians often act as gatekeepers to what books end up in their hands and this is something to be fully aware of when you're writing your middle grade heroine.

Some other things to consider:

Romance: I'm going to touch on this first since most of us are romance writers. Yes, you can have a very light romance but most of the time it would only be a B-story. This is the place for first crushes, first kisses even, but definitely no sex or dark issues.

Age: Most middle grade heroines are somewhere between nine and twelve and while it's true that kids like to read "up" from the age they are, if you do include teenagers, you need to make sure you're not bringing the teen issues with them, or else you are probably writing a YA.

Interests: While our romance heroines might like long walks on the beach and candlelight dinners, a middle grade heroine has other things on her mind. Her interests can be anything from sport, knitting, building a time machine, through to starting up a society to save Wobble Beaked penguins (shh, I'm not going to tell them that

the Wobble Beaked penguin doesn't exist. This is their story). I like to think that at this age kids aren't as jaded and therefore think more things are possible!

School: Ah, yes. That place that we all try not to remember! School is a huge part of most children's lives as they learn to navigate their way through angry teachers, bullies and friend drama. Oh, and don't forget that they need to do homework and sit exams, especially if they're thinking about their future. So, even if you're writing a middle grade fantasy that has no school, it doesn't mean you can't still tap into the issues that your reader can relate to (like feeling excluded or picked on).

Attitude: Yup, anyone who has either owned or spoken to a middle grader will know that these kids have attitude and opinions, and they're not scared to share them. While teenagers are filled with hormones that turn them into skulking creatures of the night who lose the ability to form actual words, middle graders are often a lot friendlier and ready to chat.

Experience: This is a big one. Your heroine does not have the life experience we do. Things are often black and white in their world. And they can be dramatic and what might not be a big deal to us is massive to them. So, while we might think it's crazy to run away because of an F on an exam, an eleven-year-old might find this completely reasonable. It's really important to let your character act their age rather than us as writers trying to keep them out of danger by playing 'Mum' with them.

Technology: This is definitely not the time for you to inflict your own thoughts and feelings around children and technology. Today's middle grade reader is a digital native, meaning they have grown up with technology and so their attitudes/skills are different to ours. This is something to be aware of.

Action: Kids like action. There isn't nearly as much introspection in a middle grade book as there is in adult or YA fiction, even when you see titles like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Dork Diaries*, a lot of the plot is still action based.

Family: Parents are such a pest when it comes to middle grade fiction and it probably explains why so many characters in this age group are orphans! In today's society most twelve years old can't easily sneak out of the house to go and find the missing pirate treasure buried

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in the cave five kilometers from where they live. So, considering the family dynamics and how to let your heroines have space to let the story unfold is essential.

Series: Kids love series books and so do parents (especially if they have a reluctant reader who has suddenly discovered a book they like!). This is something to consider when creating a middle grade heroine. Does she have the staying power for more than one story?

Weird Stuff: I saved this one to last but middle grade readers are very accepting of unusual things, which is why the bookshelves are full of talking cats (seriously. You have no idea how many talking cats there are), flying cars, ninja pirates, kidnapped parents, secret doorways. Also, explains why my upcoming middle grade book is about a heroine who becomes a ghost buster purely to save up money for a ski trip so she can fit in with her friends!

And one final word. In my other life as a children's librarian I get to see how much this age group loves to read. And while their parents might manage to check out one book, often their kids are getting twenty at a time, which means they're always looking for more amazing adventures to dive into!



Amanda Ashby is a multi-published author and children's librarian with a serious television addiction. Because she's mysterious, she also writes under the name Catherine Holt and her books have been nominated for a Romantic Times Reviewers Choice award, and listed by the New York Public Library's *Stuff for the Teen Age*.

The Wedding Planner's Baby is out now with *Entangled* and her next middle grade book is called *Midnight Reynolds and the Spectral Transformer*, which is out in September from Albert Whitman.

Learn more about Amanda at www.amandaashby.com and www.catherineholtauthor.com

"The Coward will run away from danger, only to strike in the dark. The Heroine will run through the dark, even though she knows the coward is waiting to strike."

— David A. Cleinman

From The President

My April report is very short as I'm on a 31st March book deadline.

April is my birthday month so I'm hoping the weather fines up a bit. It's been warm in the Hawkes Bay, but wet. We went from drought to green in the blink of an eye. It's great for the farmers, but it means the lawn mower has had to be out a lot more because the grass is growing so quickly. I hate mowing the lawns, and I did think it would be nice to have a handsome young man mow my lawn instead. Which of course set me off down the path of a romantic story idea about an overgrown lawn, a broken lawn mower, and a hunky neighbour to the rescue.

Speaking of stories ... The Chapter Short Story Contest opens this month and it's a really fun contest as well as great training to be concise. A short story makes you focus on story structure and characterization because you only have 1800 words in which to engage and move your reader. It's not easy to impart a deep, rich, vibrant story within those parameters. I challenge everyone to enter—and I promise I will too.

The contest is sponsored by Frances Loo and the Chapter Book and Tea Shop in Mt Eden, Auckland. Frances's bookshop specializes in romance fiction, and she has been an avid supporter of RWNZ for many years. [Check out our website for more details.](#)

By the way, we've heard from the IRD on our tax liability, and so far it's only about \$800. But I haven't shared the calculations this month as our Treasurer, Tania Roberts, seems to think the IRD may have made a mistake, so we have queried their findings. I'll share more when it's all sorted.

As always, if you have any concerns regarding RWNZ, please feel free to email me at president@romancewriters.co.nz

Take care—and productive writing, everyone!

Bronwen Evans
RWNZ President



Same Gender Romantic Heroines

Ada Maria Soto



I was once asked how I write same-gender romances. It was the Sunday of conference, I was tired and more than a little hungover so I quite glibly answered 'pick a gender and write it twice'. I apologize to that person. Consider this a

better answer.

First, when writing any heroine, you run into the same problems as being a woman: You can't win. If you write her strong, she's cold and unapproachable. Empathetic equals weak. Too intelligent? Not relatable. Average intelligence? Reinforcing stereotypes. Tragic back story? Why does a woman have to have something bad happen to her to be interesting? But no tragic backstory is uninteresting. Competent and liked by everyone? Unbelievable Mary Sue. Not as competent? Poorly representing women. Sexual, slut; not sexual, frigid. Wants kids? Stereotype. No kids? What's wrong with her? Swoons over the hero? Why can't she be a strong independent woman who doesn't need no man? ...return to start.

Make her lesbian and you get another level. Butch? Stereotype. Fem? Just there for titillation. Manage a mid-ground and you're taking the easy route and not really representing the community. A bisexual woman is a selfish confused slut. If she ends up with a man it's reinforcing the heteronormative patriarchy (see *Kissing Jessica Stein*). If she ends up with a woman then she was a lesbian all along. And as anyone who has spent time in a same gender relationship can tell you: eventually someone is going to ask 'which one is the man?' It's like looking at a pair of chopsticks and asking which one is the fork. (And so much of this criticism comes from other women, but that's a whole other rant.)

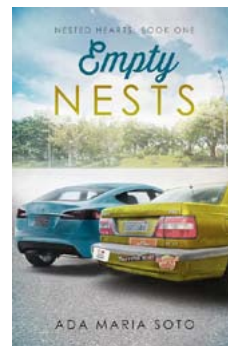
So why even bother if you're going to get so much grief? First, because you have a story to tell. Stories that sit in your head and never make it onto the page rot and twist around. They keep you up at night and drive you mad. That's why we're writers to begin with. The second reason is because someone out there needs your book. With the world as it is, there is someone out there who is desperate to see themselves reflected on the page and to know that someone out there believes that someone like themselves is capable of a happy ever after can be that ray of light that gets them through the darkest of

times. Your book can truly mean something to someone. I got that letter from a reader. I cried for half an hour.

Now the question is, how? To quote Margaret Stohl who writes *Mighty Captain Marvel* for Marvel comics: 'Start by writing a human'. That is truly the best advice. Strip the titles, genders, and assumptions and start with an interesting person. You don't need to look between their legs and decide female or male. Gender is more complicated and less binary than that. Sexuality is more complicated and less binary than that. Once you have a couple of interesting people, go with an interesting story. The characters and the story might change in ways you didn't expect. If you are writing a more traditional romance that just isn't working, maybe step back and look at your characters, talk to them. Are they the gender, sexuality, race or nationality you thought they were when you started? Possibly not. Just because your last fifty books featured a straight white female and a straight white male doesn't mean your work in progress needs to.

Only then, when you have an engaging human, can you build her story. We can get so wrapped up in writing a heroine we forget she is a hero. She might be strapping on a skin-tight costume and taking on Thanos, a destroyer of worlds. She might be taking care of two kids, holding down a full-time career, and keeping her household in order. Personally, I'd rather take on Thanos than face the pile of dishes in my sink, but she needs to be the hero of her own story, free of all the baggage the word 'heroine' might come with.

In the end you just need to tell a good story, fill it with interesting people, and don't try to force it into the shape of what came before. The readers who need to find you will find you, and will love you for the stories you tell.



Ada Maria Soto is a New Zealand based multi-genre writer. She is also a mom, cook, knitter, and sports fan. Listings for her work can be found at adamariasoto.com Her most recent series for sale is *Empty Nests*.



More Exciting #Love— Writing Romance in the Digital Age News

As you'll know, agent Victoria Cappello had to pull out of the conference. The good news is that we're now able to share the names and details of our new agent **and** our global Harlequin editor.

Agent **Jessica Watterson** from the **Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency** will be traveling Down Under to meet you.

Jessica has been an agent at the Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency since 2014. She's actively building a client list and so is acquiring. In 2016 she sold across multiple publishing houses—Penguin Random House, St. Martin's Press, Kensington, Simon and Schuster, Carina Press, Sourcebooks, and Montlake.

A graduate of the University of California at Irvine, Jessica has immersed herself in books and literature from the time she could first read. While in college, she started an indie review blog that has featured author interviews, and reviewed several self-published books that ended up on the New York Times Best Seller list.

Jessica is always on the hunt for new and diverse voices, and is most interested in all genres of romance.

For **historical romance**, she favors settings in America, Scotland, or somewhere outside of the traditional Regency setting.

In the **contemporary** sphere, she loves novels with strong characters that jump off the page and stay with you long after you have finished the book.

In **paranormal romance**, she is looking for anything unusual and unique—vampires need not apply.

In **romantic suspense**, it takes something different and edgy to capture her attention. She greatly enjoys anything [Kristen Ashley](#) has written in this genre.

She also loves **Women's Fiction** that concerns itself with elements of life that can greatly change one's perspective and outlook on cultures and experiences.

On the **YA** side, Jessica is looking for just about anything that aligns itself with fantasy, sci-fi, contemporary, lgbtq reads, #ownvoices, and—of course—a bit of romance thrown in is never a bad thing in her opinion.

She is also interested in author-illustrated picture books that capture the fun and joy of reading between adults and children.

Jessica's sales include: Amber Lynn Natusch's *Dare to Tell a Lie* (Tor Teen), Katie Ruggle's *Christmas Search and Rescue/K9* novel (Sourcebooks), Jade Chandler's *Brotherhood Investigations* (Carina Press), Dawn Lueddecke's *Montana Mountain Series* (Lyrical/Kensington), Debbie Burns *Rescue Me Series* (Sourcebooks), Emily Alibright's *Everyday Magic* (Merit Press).

Please note that Jessica is specifically not interested in: middle grade, non-fiction, memoir, cookbooks, poetry, short stories, screenplays, self-help, or religious/spiritual books.

Now for the **Harlequin Global Editor—Allison Carroll** who is based in NY at Graydon House Books. Allison has worked across all Harlequin lines including Series, HQN, and now Graydon. She will be taking pitches for all Harlequin lines and will organize submissions where appropriate.

Allison Carroll is a Montana transplant who once upon a time packed all her belongings in a U-Haul and drove cross-country to NYC. Her introduction to publishing began at Dorchester Publishing in 2009 and continued at Macmillan's Heroes and Heartbreakers. Allison joined the Harlequin family in 2012 and counts several New York Times bestselling authors among the writers she works with.

Allison started her Harlequin career working on Series before moving onto HQN and now Graydon House,

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so she is well-placed to represent the wealth of writing opportunities across Harlequin Series and Trade. And I know she is thrilled to be attending the conferences.

Graydon House Books, is a select hardcover and trade paperback imprint of Harlequin that will showcase commercial women's fiction with a relationship element woven through. Stories will range in tone from light-hearted humour to emotional tearjerkers and edgier drama.

I hope you are all as excited about conference as I am. We have a super line up this year and early bird registration is open until the end of May!

I hope we see you there.

Bronwen Evans
President

"It does not take a great supernatural heroine or magical hero to save the world.

We all save it every day, and we all destroy it—in our own small ways—by every choice we make and every tiniest action resulting from that choice.

The next time you feel useless and impotent, remember what you are in fact doing in this very moment. And then observe your tiny, seemingly meaningless acts and choices coalesce and cascade together into a powerful positive whole.

The world—if it could—will thank you for it. And if it does not ... well, a true heroine or hero does not require it."

— Vera Nazarian

"I'm a damsel, I'm in distress, I can handle this. Have a nice day!"

— Walt Disney Company

The Welcome Mat

We're rolling out the red carpet this month for another lovely group of new and returning members. Welcome, ladies. It's great to see you.

Angela Bissell - Wellington

Donna Blaber - Whangarei

Dorothy Fletcher - Gisborne

Amanda Gray - Feilding

Megan Herles-Mooar - Christchurch

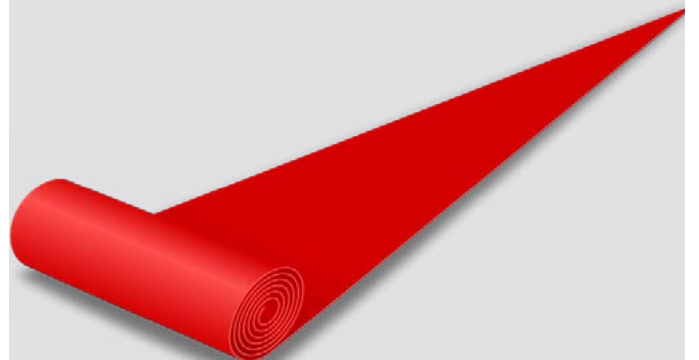
Sandra Hodgen-Gauld - Wellington

Krystal Liu - Auckland

Soraya Nicholas - Christchurch

Shelley Nixon - Wellington

Sita Rajasingham - Wellington



Writing the Christian Romance Heroine

Iola Goulton



How do you write a Christian romance heroine? In much the same way as you'd write any romance heroine—which may well depend on the publisher or imprint you're targeting.

The heroine in a Harlequin Blaze novel is likely to be more sexually outgoing than her Harlequin Heartwarming counterpart, who in turn will be different from the heroine in a Harlequin Love Inspired Christian romance.

That's right. Harlequin publishes Christian romance—sixteen books each month across the Love Inspired, Love Inspired Historical and Love Inspired Suspense lines. As in the general market, Harlequin dominates category romance in the Christian market, although there are many trade publishers seeking single titles and series, and some which focus on novellas.

Christian romance heroines have a lot in common with their general market counterparts. They might be in their late teens, or older. They might have successful careers, or could have had everything go wrong. They might live in the big city or a small town. Cowboys and rodeos and small towns in Texas are popular, as are Navy SEALs, paramedics and FBI agents. Mail order bride and marriages of convenience are common historical tropes.

Most Christian romances are set in the USA (which reflects the bulk of the buying population), but England and Scotland are also popular settings—thanks largely to the BBC and shows like *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Downton Abbey*.

So what are the similarities, and what are the differences?

SIMILARITIES

• She must be likeable

Who enjoys a romance novel where you don't like or respect the heroine? I don't. It makes me wonder what the hero sees in her. If she does appear unlikeable at first, then I need to understand why.

Does she have an inaccurate self-image? (Her identity, to borrow from Michael Hauge.) If so, the scenes from the hero's point of view need to show me her essence, so I can understand what he sees in her.

Is her unlikeable exterior hiding her internal motivation or conflict? If so, the scenes from her point of view need to hint at her hidden trauma, and it's likely that her deepening relationship with God will lead her to overcome this issue and come into her essence.

There are novels where the protagonist isn't likeable, but I find these are more common in women's fiction than in romance ... and the character often becomes likeable by the end as she discovers the truth about the lie, about her essence.

• She must be real

We want characters we can relate to, not perfect Christians. Christian readers aren't perfect people, and we don't want to read about perfect Mary Sue heroines (we might be a little more forgiving of almost-perfect men). The character needs to feel authentic, real, someone we can imagine as a friend.

DIFFERENCES

• She must be a Christian

This is one the major difference between a Christian romance heroine and her general market counterpart. One of the basic tenets of Christian romance is that the couple must both be Christians by the end of the book in order to gain their Happy Ever After ending.

This means the heroine either needs to be a Christian at the beginning of the novel, or she needs to become a Christian during the novel. If she becomes a Christian, this should be the natural outcome of her internal struggle rather than a convenient *deus ex machina* introduced to make the romance palatable to Christian readers.

If she is a Christian, she must think and act like a Christian (with allowances for new Christians). Christian romance readers expect there will be no swearing and no on-the-page sex scenes (and closed door scenes are only appropriate between married couples, or when it's clearly presented as a sin). Note that the same standards of Christian beliefs and behaviour apply to the hero.

• She is human

This is the other big difference between Christian and general market romance. Christian romance heroines (and heroes) are always human, and always heterosexual. There are no vampires, werewolves or other non-human beings.

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The occasional angel (or demon) may feature, but not as the hero or heroine in a romance novel.

SIMILAR, BUT DIFFERENT

Christian heroines are much the same as general market heroines, with the added element of a personal Christian faith. My favourites are the kind of heroine I'm trying to write. They're intelligent, funny, loyal women looking for their Happy Ever After with a Christian man who will love them the way God means for men to love their wives.

I'll be talking more about the Christian romance genre in my presentation at the RWNZ Conference in Rotorua in August. I'd love to see you there. And if you'd like to know who publishes Christian romance, download *Christian Publishing: A List of Publishers Specializing in Christian Fiction* from www.christianediting.co.nz.

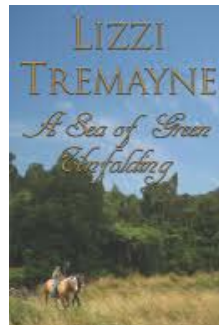
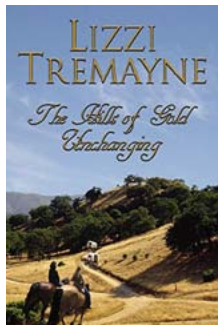
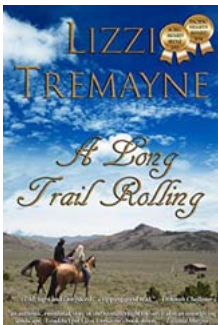
Iola Goulton is a reader, reviewer, freelance fiction editor and aspiring Christian romance author. She holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree in marketing and has twenty years' experience in human resources. Iola is a member of the Christian Proofreaders and Editors Network, Romance Writers of New Zealand, and American Christian Fiction Writers. She won the 2016 ACFW Genesis Award for her novella, Play On, Jordan, and is currently working on the rest of the series.

“One of the most dangerous of literary ventures is the little, shy, unimportant heroine whom none of the other characters value. The danger is that your readers may agree with the other characters.”

— C.S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays*



Get To Know Our Authors

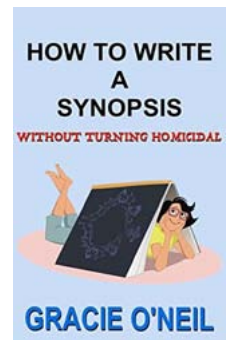


Lizzi Tremayne

Lizzi Tremayne grew up riding wild in California before emigrating to New Zealand. A member of our C2C group, Lizzi writes historical romantic suspense, veterinary fiction (pending) and nonfiction. Her love? Entering writing competitions to improve her writing. Find out more at <https://lizzitremayne.com/store/>

Gracie O'Neil

Gracie O'Neil is a member of our C2C group. She writes Romantic Suspense—with and without paranormal additives—and non-fiction for writers. You can find out more at www.gracieoneil.com



To be featured on this free page, please email **EITHER** one cover **OR** three, **PLUS** bio, **PLUS** buy links to: heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz by the 20th of the month deadline.

This Chick Writes - Creating The Chick Lit Heroine

Kate O'Keeffe



There was a time when the typical chick lit heroine was a vacuous, booze-swilling, fashionista with a serious shoe habit.

Or perhaps a serial-dating, girl-about-town in London or New York, single and lonely. But that

was way back in the mid-'90's, when the subgenre first officially emerged. We've come a long way, baby!

These days, you could pick up a chick lit novel and read about a heroine in her (gasp!) mid-forties, dealing with divorce, kids, career—and other catastrophes. Or a young, single mother in rural Minnesota, hiding a dark, haunting secret holding her back from living the life she wants. Not vapid or superficial, chick lit heroines have become as diverse as the authors who create them, tackling a variety of issues facing women today.

With such a broad range, how do I write my chick lit heroines? My process is probably not a million miles away from your typical romance writer's: I think up what I hope is a compelling, likeable character; work out what her challenges will be; write a detailed backstory: and, finally, what she wants out of life. That last point informs the theme of my story, because a chick lit heroine nearly always thinks she wants one thing when, really, she needs something else entirely. Jessica Banks, my heroine in *Styling Wellywood*, thinks she wants a life of fashion and glamour and sexy tennis pro, Scott, when really what she needs is the satisfaction of helping other people and being with her long-time friend, Ben—who may or may not have been in love with her for years (you'll have to read it to find out).

Generally, when I'm writing my chick lit heroines, there are three key ingredients I think make them stand out from other genres.

• Humour

In my opinion, humour is nothing short of vital in chick lit. In fact, I have yet to pick up a chick lit novel devoid of any humour, and I've read a few. My books are riddled with funny observations and hilarious situations (I hope), including those cringe-worthy moments you can barely bring yourself to read. What's more, as the reader is in my heroine's head, her internal voice is often humorous, with wry observations of her fellow man—and woman.

Which brings me neatly to my next key ingredient...

• Point of View

This, more often than not, is the sole preserve of the heroine. Chick lit readers want to get inside her head, to see the world through her lens—the hero, if there is one (and sometimes there's not), included. My books are all written in first person POV. I believe this creates conflict, generates tension, and allows those wonderful misunderstandings to abound! Of course, first person POV can be limiting but, equally, it can be an incredibly useful plot device. In my novel, *Miss Perfect Meets Her Match*, the reader has no idea the man Brooke Mortimer's in love with tried to stop his company putting hers out of business. So, when he turns up on her doorstep, we are rooting for her to slam that door right back in his face. Ah, misunderstandings are chick lit gold.

• Female Empowerment

In contrary to the way in which chick lit heroines can be maligned as simply 'fluff', I believe many are empowered women, living and loving in the contemporary world. Take Brooke Mortimer: she's a successful entrepreneur, running her own business and calling the shots. Sure, events in the story change things for her, but she's a woman making decisions about her own life, not being passively blown around in the wind. Equally, her sister in another one of my novels, *Falling for Grace*, may have fallen (quite literally) for the hottest guy on TV, but she's the one who breaks up with him, and she's the one who decides they should get back together.

• Happy Ending

Of course, in the end, my heroines get their man in a wonderfully happy ending. I know happy endings are very common in romance, so this isn't ground-breaking stuff here, people. But in chick lit, a happy ending for the heroine is vital—although there's always that tension I mentioned between what she thinks she wants and what she actually needs to give the reader a few twists and turns along the way.

Although many chick lit novels tackle deeper issues along with the happy ending, such as suicide in my novel, *Styling Wellywood*, people read chick lit for its feel-good, light-hearted, escapist value. Not giving my heroines a happy outcome would be denying the reader that wonderful satisfaction.

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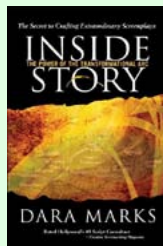
Overall, it's important to me I write a heroine I like—I'm going to be living with her in my head for as long as I'm writing the book. Far from being a one-dimensional, superficial cliché, she needs to grow and change throughout the novel, taking the reader on a journey through a quagmire of emotions. Ultimately, she needs to provide the reader with that feel-good sense that all is right in the chick lit world by the last page.



Kate O'Keeffe writes funny, sexy, feel-good romantic comedies, and has loved rom coms, romance, and chick lit since her first encounter with *Bridget Jones* as a young, impressionable writer. She's been a teacher and a sales executive, but is now content as a mother and writer, madly scribbling while juggling real life with her wonderful family and two very scruffy, naughty dogs. Find out more about Kate at www.kateokeeffe.com

“Be your own heroine. The only thing you need to be saved from is the idea that you need to be saved.”
— *Unknown*

The Bookshelf



Inside Story
Dara Marks

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06VSVCVKZ/>

The transformational arc is the deeper line of structure found inside the story. Knowing how to work with the arc enhances your ability to:

- Express your unique point of view
- Give meaning and urgency to the line of action
- Infuse your characters with richness, subtlety, and surprise
- Develop a powerful emotional undercurrent
- Make your stories stand out and get attention



5-Minute Book Marketing for Authors
Penny Sansevieri

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01MYE730O/>

Yes, you *can* market a book in only 5 minutes a day! This book is set up so that you can do *only* 5-minute incremental work but it also includes instructions for when you are ready to dig deeper and spend more time. So it's really two books in one.



Marketing For Writers Who Hate Marketing
James Scott Bell

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06XHQZ31Q/>

Marketing For Writers Who Hate Marketing will help you prioritize your marketing so you can concentrate on the handful of most effective tools, and eliminate the worry that you're never doing enough. It will teach you:

- The #1 most effective marketing tool ... one you already love!
- How to maximize the all-important first impression your book makes on a browser
- How to turn browsers into readers
- How to turn readers into fans
- Pricing as a strategic marketing tool
- How to grow and nurture an email list
- All the time-sucking practices you can avoid so you're free to write!
- And more



The Writer's Block Myth
Heloise Jones

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<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06XG28X95/>

The Writer's Block Myth is a grounded and inspirational guide for what every writer and creative person wants - to live their joy in the process and to create. It's a culmination of hundreds of hours of conversations and work with writers, artists, and creatives, as well as interview-conversations conducted with writers of all levels, interests, and experience.



Build Your Author Platform
Carole Jelen & Michael McCallister

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00J75ISVC/>

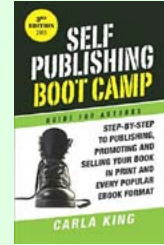
A great book is no longer enough. An author platform is the most powerful key to success in today's saturated market, and increasingly, publishers are demanding that new authors come to them with an existing audience of interested followers. Authors who are self-publishing have an even bigger need to build an engaged audience.



Tick-Tock Plot
Jacqueline Garlick

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01E6GQICW/>

Learn to plot faster and more effectively the first time, avoiding endless rounds of revision. Tick-Tock Plot is an invaluable plotting technique that will last an author a lifetime. The concrete, tactile, visuals (provided in the eBook) are designed to be used over and over for all future novels projects. Tick-Tock Plot works effectively in any genre. It can also be used for scripts. It is easy to follow and it's kind of fun!



Self Publishing Boot Camp
Carla King

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00XIM68H6/>

Whether you're writing fiction, nonfiction or creating a sophisticated full-color book or children's book, you'll learn how to produce it in print and all the popular ebook formats with services and technologies at all price points to help you along your journey. Up-to-the-minute updates and changes in the industry are supplied on SelfPub-BootCamp.com.

Nelson Writer's Workshop



The lovely Yvonne Lindsay took a writer's workshop in Nelson. It was very much appreciated and enjoyed by all who attended. Read more in the Nelson Regional Round Up Report.

*"I would venture to guess that Anon,
who wrote so many poems without signing
them, was often a woman."*

— Virginia Woolf

Writing The Historical Heroine

Wendy Vella



“Well behaved women seldom make history.”

We've all read this quote before and nodded our heads. Boring is not how you want to see the heroine in any book, and let's face it we've all read a few yawn-inducing characters!

One of my favorite heroines is Catherine Marks, companion to the Hathaway sisters, in Lisa Kleypas' fabulous historical *Married By Morning*. The evolution of her character through the series, sees her stepping out from the dull, mousy façade that her past forced her to retreat behind, and become the person she truly wanted (and deserved) to be.

I've always felt the key to writing a compelling historical heroine is to make sure your readers connect with her from the very start of the book. In saying that, she can be haughty, sarcastic, rebellious or unconventional as the best of them, as long as your reader can glimpse that touch of something special, that will keep them turning the page to the end of the book. A glimpse of a weakness, like a fear of horse manure (of which there was plenty) or a need to save a spider while strolling down Rotten Row, will allow the reader to see that there is more to her than meets the eye.

Yes, there is no getting away from the fact that in some historical eras, women should be perceived as rule followers - and she can be, but also so much more.

If we think back to our real life historical heroines, none would have made the dent they did in history had they not stirred the waters. Boudicca the Celtic Queen who summoned her people to war, or Joan of Arc, both a saint and legendary female warrior, were two strong women who made a stand and bucked convention.

Creative license is a wonderful thing and none more so in an era where we, or no one else alive today, have lived! Our knowledge is through books, and these accounts of a time that we can only imagine. This allows us so much scope to create colourful characters with quirky traits. Use humour to bring your heroine to life, like when Lord Hathaway was injured badly and his sister said, "I'm reluctant to give you too much sympathy, in light of my suspicion that you've only done this to get out of the turnip planting!"

My own heroines have evolved with each book I write,

but I like to think they all have strength. Some have to dig deep to find it - and yes, a man usually comes along to help in that transition, but I like them to find their feet for the most part, on their own. In my Langley Sisters series, the sisters are left penniless after the death of their father. Rather than sit back and wait to be carted off to the poorhouse, they become highwaymen. In another, my heroine likes to box, and does so regularly with her own punching bag.

It is important to understand that your heroine plays a major role in driving your novel forward, especially in Regency/Victorian times. They cannot be perfect, because then we would have nothing to fix, and no emotional journey and character growth for them to experience. Nor can they be bland, or "cardboard cut out characters", as readers will not empathise with them (hey no-one said this was easy)!

Historical time periods offer such wonderful, exciting settings for your heroine to shine. The glittering ball rooms of society, the vicious gossips, the social climate, customs and, most importantly, the dashing men! Be creative, do your research, and most importantly, write your historical heroine as someone we readers grow to understand, admire and come to love, just as much as your hero!



With 20 books published, best-selling author Wendy Vella's passion for romance novels has grown stronger with every new release. She loves writing strong heroes and feisty heroines, and has many ideas running through her head at all times. Wendy writes contemporary, Regency and historical paranormal romances with her trademark humour, spice and intrigue. www.WendyVella.com

“The thing about growing up with Fred and George is that you sort of start thinking anything's possible if you've got enough nerve.”

— J.K. Rowling *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Loading Books to Google Play

Kris Pearson



This is the least helpful site I have ever seen. I can load books onto Amazon in five minutes flat. Google Play takes anything up to an hour (if you're lucky.)

But they have more stores than anyone, so I'm hoping it's worth the effort. I loaded my Spanish ones to European stores through a site called Xinxii. They didn't have the option of Google Play for a long time, but it suddenly popped up, so I chose it as somewhere they should distribute to, and \$508 arrived in my PayPal account yesterday for December sales. So ...

For starters you need to apply to join Google Play's Partner Centre. This is currently closed to new people, but if you think you want to use them in the future, I'd apply right now.

Once you are a member, log in and go to your Books Catalogue. Click ADD BOOK. You will of course already have all the files and info that you need easily accessible! (You'll find it all listed in this doc of mine.)

First they ask for your Identifier. Fill in your ISBN. (They can create you something if you don't have one.) Leave default settings alone. Now click CREATE—and watch the top coloured bit whizz around while it puts your Identifier in.

Type in your title and subtitle. Then add your book description blurb and bio in the appropriate boxes. GP has nowhere for keywords, so add some to the end of your book description.

Then you get a mysterious box saying Contributors. No one contributed to my books except me, so I ignored that and found I had a book up with no author name! Click Contributors and choose author. Type in your name. Click NEXT up in the top corner. This will bring you to a page called CONTENT. Here you upload an EPUB file, a PDF file, and a cover file. They want the files labelled with your ISBN.EPUB and your ISBN.PDF and your ISBN and an underscore and front cover as one word. If you use their own Identifier, I guess that replaces the ISBN. You will see the files loading up in the multi-coloured top piece. Then they tell you nothing is processed yet. Ignore this and click NEXT up in the corner again.

You're now at PRICES. Click Add a new price. Enter USD and 3.99 for a 2.99 book, because they always

discount, and this will keep you safely above the Amazon level. Leave WORLD alone. I later found a sneaky little para entirely elsewhere about loading your local currency and country, so I'm trying that too. Click NEXT.

You are now at SETTINGS. Good luck! You start with a welcoming little box that says Book format unknown. Click it and check digital, paperback, or whatever your book is. If you have more than one edition they'll want an Identifier for each.

Subject. Click +Add under the incomprehensible box that says 'BISAC (Nort...' This will turn into North America. Start to type your subject - fiction/romance whatever, and up will come a lot of what I assume are library codes. Choose some. You can have up to five by clicking the +Add button again. You can also choose different countries here—UK and Australia—add your codes again. And if you speak French or German, or the language of whatever other country you might want, go for them as well if you can recognise suitable subjects in those languages. I did the first several in English until I found out I was supposed to be choosing the other languages. And as the books are all in English this will probably make no difference. Because my typing is bad I watch the keyboard, not the screen, so I missed all the options to start with.

Language. Fill in English. Age Groups. Click the arrow. I always choose 18+ because they're not juvenile books and this seems to be a guide for parents with children of different ages. Add publication date, page count, series name and volume in series if you have them.

Distribution settings. I've been told to choose DRM enabled, show photos in e-book, and include scanned pages. There's a box here to indicate 'for mature audiences' if yours is.

Click NEXT.

Things are now looking promising because you come to PUBLISH. Click Ready to Publish (the lower one) and choose the box that says Google Play and Google Books.

You are very likely now to get a nasty red bar and a snippy instruction that says 'Please check your values and try again.' It's not helpful! However, do go back and see if by chance you have left anything out. If you're satisfied it's okay, there doesn't seem to be an actual Publish

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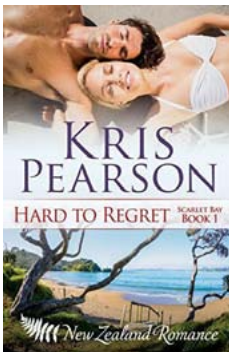
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button you can click, so at this point I simply leave the scene. If you go back to your Books Catalogue a bit later, it will probably tell you something needs attention. Don't necessarily believe it. In every case with mine (apart from the missing author names) it has said the price is wrong or not applicable. Having reloaded and reloaded and got the same darn comment, I found that if I swore with frustration, fell into bed, and left it alone overnight, it suddenly seemed acceptable to them. I therefore concluded there was nothing whatsoever wrong with my price and it was them calculating all the currencies. I have no proof of this. Why they can't say 'we are converting your currencies' instead of sounding so accusing, I've no idea.

And with any luck, you're done!

However, I uploaded my book of short stories and took notes as I went so I could write this up for you. When I went back to check my book it said the author was missing and the book description was missing. Nonsense. I know quite well I filled them in. However, it doesn't work without them so I went back and reloaded. This often happens, and it's ridiculously time-consuming. Even Faye, who is very good at this stuff, says she sometimes has to load two or three times.

Once they were reloaded I got the wrong price message again. I am leaving it alone and hopefully it will come right.



Kris Pearson is a life-long writer, a keen gardener, an advertising copywriter, a decor specialist, and a prolific author of contemporary New Zealand Romance. You can find out more about her and her work at www.krispearson.com

"A hero: a man or woman who is unsatisfied by his condition, and resolves to do something about it."

— *Bangambiki Habyarimana, Pearls Of Eternity*

The Sandra Hyde Romance Writers Memorial Scholarship



The Sandra Hyde Romance Writers Trust is offering a scholarship to the Romance Writers of NZ annual conference - **#Love: Writing romance in the digital age** - August 18-20, 2017 in Rotorua. More information on the conference here <https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/event/conference-info/>

Romance author Sandra Hyde (writing as Sandra Hyatt) passed away suddenly on August 21, 2011. Because so many have been touched by Sandra's life, either personally or through reading her wonderful books, her family has set up a trust to continue her legacy of generosity and kindness by furthering the career of an emerging writer.

An active member of Romance Writers of New Zealand, Sandra served on the executive for three terms and was always willing to reach out to new writers with advice and encouragement.

Money raised by the Trust will form an annual education grant, awarded to an aspiring NZ-based romance writer to enable them to attend a national or international writers conference, to improve their craft and progress their writing goals.

2017 Prize: RWNZ Conference fees (Friday Workshop and Weekend Conference, plus cocktail party). If the winner is not currently a member of RWNZ, their prize will include a one-year membership subscription, since only members can attend the Weekend Conference. The winner will also receive \$150 contribution toward expenses.

Who can enter: Any New Zealand-based writer of romantic fiction (published or unpublished). Anyone who has previously entered (other than a prior successful applicant), is welcome to reapply.

Deadline to enter: Midnight, NZ time, Monday, May 22, 2017.

Winner announced: By Monday, May 29, 2017.

For more information and how to enter, go to: <https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/events/sandra-hyde-romance-writers-memorial-scholarship/>

Good luck, we look forward to receiving your entry.

The Trustees of the Sandra Hyde Romance Writers Trust

Regional Round-Up Reports

Auckland

Convenor: Pamela Gervai (pamelagervai.com)

Twenty-seven people attended the meeting on Saturday 4 March. Ruth Bell stood in for me to chair the meeting and her report follows;

"Tessa Radley <http://www.tessaradley.com/tessa.php> gave an excellent, engrossing, and well thought out presentation about Deepening Characterisation. She drew on her knowledge of SCHEMA theory (a psychology concept) to create a system for giving your characters realistic flaws and beliefs (or wounds as Michael Hauge would call them), how to ensure that your character's thoughts and actions are in keeping with this flaw/belief, and how to build a character arc from them. The talk prompted much discussion and I think everyone went away with nuggets of wisdom for their writer's arsenal. A huge thanks to Tessa for giving such a great presentation. "

Our next meeting will be on 6 May and our speaker (details to follow in the next Chapter email) will be doing a presentation of Side Saddles - very useful for historical, fantasy and steampunk writers. As usual, the venue is the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion from 12.30 until 3.00 p.m. Please bring change for the raffles, a gold coin donation, and a plate to share.

Coast to Coast

Convenor: Vivienne Matthews
(viviennematthewswriter@gmail.com)

Our March meeting at Jill's lovely villa was filled with great food, fantastic laughs, and the chance to catch up on where people were at with their writing. Then Derryn took us through some fun writing exercises including *Show, don't Tell* and *Writing Our Obituaries*—with a twist where we had to include two lies (and figure out which parts were the truth). Belly dancing in Pakistan, attaining degrees with names I have no hope of pronouncing, parachuting out of planes to help fund-raise for struggling authors, dying at our desks while writing our latest best-selling novel—okay, so some of the lies were obvious, but the truths were just as staggering.

Once again, big thanks to Jill for opening up her home—especially so close to moving!—and to Derryn for giving us such a laughter-filled workshop.

Our next meeting is on Saturday April 8th in Waihi at Shirley Wine's place where Iola Goulton will present a session on *Building Your Platform and Using Social Media as an Author*. Here's a great chance to learn tips and tricks to avoid some of the traps of the social-media age.

Hawkes Bay

Convenor: Kendra Delugar
(kendraonthemove@hotmail.com)

Our March meeting took place at Bron's. After our usual catch-up and news session, those of us who had brought synopses of their WIP read them out to the group and got feedback. It was enlightening to see how different people tackled synopses and what tricks could be used to explain long set-ups in just one or two sentences.

We meet on the first Saturday of the month at 1pm, and new members are always welcome. The April meeting will be held at Kate's, where we've left things fairly open at this stage as we'll have a new member!

Wellington/Kapiti Coast

Convenor: Kris Pearson (kris.p@paradise.net.nz)

Our March meeting took place at Anna's lovely beach-front home—and she's keen to have us on a semi-permanent basis. We enjoyed the sight and sound of the sea while we heard from Gudrun about how close she is to publishing (and passed around her phone to see her lovely cover.)

Leeann told us all about Instafreebie and Amazon advertising. Anne discussed Facebook advertising. Kris shared the interesting nightmare of uploading her books to Google Play. Then Anna read us some of her medieval for comments, and the beginning of Jeanette's rowing romance. Jeanette was keen to see if we understood the rowing terms she'd used. Then Kris read the start (and the alternative start) of her current WIP and asked for preferences. Both!

Nelson

Convenor: Annika Ohlson-Smith
(nelsonromancewriters@xtra.co.nz)

The Workshop with Yvonne Lindsay on 25 February was awesome! Twenty-three people attended and everything went so smoothly thanks to all chipping in. A HUGE thank you to Yvonne and to RWNZ for offering us this event. Many of the participants were new to writing and had never been to a writing workshop before. They all went home very happy, and six of them expressed interest in joining our group; four of those came to our March meeting and will be back. So, watch this space for new members of RWNZ.

At our March meeting we had a good look at the entry form of our previous short story competition and rewrote it to suit this year's competition. The launch is planned to be on 1 June. A lot of chatting about writing and answering questions from the newcomers at the cuppa and cake finished our day quite late.