

HEART TO HEART

Conflict From Character

Conflict makes pages turn, but how do you craft great conflict?

RITA award-winning author **Molly O'Keefe** suggests ways to write believable characters who bring real conflict with them.



I have a sticky note over my computer that says: a love story is a character story because the reader already knows the ending. And every time I sit down to write, it reminds me that the success of my conflict, plot, and ultimately the reader's reading experience, rests on those make-believe people's shoulders.

In the books I write for Harlequin Superromance and Bantam Dell, character is directly tied to conflict. Character and conflict are the writer's version of the chicken or the egg question. Conflict makes pages turn, but characters create the conflict. Without one, you can't have the other. No matter what kind of book you are writing—high-adventure, vampire paranormal, sci-fi fantasy erotica, or a straight-up contemporary romance—you have to have conflict and the characters that make it believable.

One of my biggest pet peeves as a reader is when a character suddenly acts out of character to serve the plot. For example: the mousy librarian, who couldn't even stand up to her boss/boyfriend/mother/person-in-front-of-them-at-the-grocery-store, suddenly decides to save the world from the vampires. And, oddly enough, happens to know kung fu.

I'm not saying your mousy librarian character can't save us all from vampires, you just have to make it believable. And for crying out loud, give us a couple of scenes of her at least *learning* the kung fu.

A great example of a believable character holding up a crazy conflict is Diana Gabaldon's fantastic *Outlander*. The heroine gets sucked back in time. She gets kidnapped and chased, she causes lots of external problems, but because the heroine is head-strong, and independent and impetuous at times, we believe that this might actually happen to her. We follow her anywhere.

For myself, and I think every romance novelist trying to write believable

Conflict needs to come from a hole in the character caused by something that happened in their past which, through story events, the characters will struggle and fill.

characters creating believable conflict, this is the best definition of conflict **ever**: Conflict needs to come from a hole in the character caused by something that happened in their past which, through story events, the characters will struggle and fill. The external and internal conflicts exist on many levels; it begins deep and wells up into conflicts between characters.

My favorite movie is *Good Will Hunting*, and not just because we see young Matt Damon without his shirt, but because the movie totally encapsulates that definition. The main character, Will, never trusts anyone. A terribly abused foster-kid, he has spent his whole life pushing people away, except for his

loyal friends who have known him forever. So, when he meets the Minnie Driver character, despite his obvious love for her, he puts a thousand walls between them with lies designed to keep her away. All of their small arguments are about when she will meet his brothers and see where he lives (lies, all lies)—his internal conflict creates external conflict.

So—how do we create well-rounded, believable characters? Excellent question.

I try to work out four main things about my characters. Now, a word to the wise. I would do all of this before I started writing and then I would do it again, after my first draft—because my characters were so different by the end of the book from what I envisioned at the beginning.

This is totally normal, but one of the biggest problems I see with new writers is that they try to pigeonhole their evolved characters into the conflicts and plots in their original idea. This is a sure fire way to get rejected.

Books change, characters change, and smart writers know how to use those changes to their advantage, to give their stories more dimension. Once you finish your first draft, make sure everything still fits together before you butt your head against a brick wall during revisions.

But let's start with our heroine:

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- 4....**WOOS, HOOS, & NEWS** has all the latest woots hot off the press.
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Editors' Desk

Ever just wanted to walk away? Wander off into the sunset?

Ever wished you were someone else, without your current problems, job, spouse, kids... pick an item. Any item.

The wonderful thing about being a writer is that you can, at the drop of a small, tasteful Thesaurus, siphon those extra kilos off your butt and redistribute them artistically onto your chest. You can speak fluent German, become an instant millionaire, discover a cure for cancer, and raise articulate kids who know how to communicate without texting via cellphone.

Well, okay, I lie about the cellphone—some things are pretty much impossible even in fantasy—but the rest is doable. For a brief, shining moment you can become another person (inside your head, anyway) and you can also, if you do it right, make a living from it.

This month's focus for *Heart To Heart* is on those wonderful, frustrating, annoying, tender, loving aspects of personality that can make or break a hero or heroine in the heart of a reader. So pour that coffee, folks, and join us for a whirlwind tour of Characterville: where everyone **thinks** they know your name.

Gracie, Rachel, Bron, & Karen

H2H Editorial Team Contest

ARE YOU TEMPTED?

This month's H2H is all about engaging characters, so here's your chance to use the helpful information and wow us with your hero.

Give us a 200 word description of your *hero* to **tempt** us. The description can be characteristics, personality, physical description... but whatever it is it has to make us say,

"Yummy! I want to meet him."

The first 30 emails containing your character descriptions received by 10th June 2011 will be entered in the contest. Email your entries to Bronwen,

romance@bronwenevans.com

The rest of the Editorial team, Gracie, Karen, and Rachel, will select the top five 'temptations' and **Margie Lawson** will be the final judge who picks the overall winner.

The winner will receive a lecture packet from Margie Lawson—
Writing Body Language and Dialogue Cues like a Psychologist.

Learn how to write body language and dialogue cues from a kinesics specialist. Writers will learn how to write fresh:

- **Body Language Basics:** facial messages, lips, eyes, chin, full facial expression, flicker-face, gestures, posture, hierarchical zones...
- **Body Language Clusters**
- **Avoidance and deception cues**
- **Vibes—beyond "spidey" senses and hair-raising**
- **Turning Points driven by subtle body language cues**
- **Body Language and Dialogue Cues for POV and Non-POV characters**
- **Body Language and Dialogue Cues with Rhetorical Devices**
- **Specific Emotion-driven full Kinesics Patterns for anxiety, fear, joy, sadness, lust, shock, surprise...**



Each teaching point will be illustrated with examples from bestselling authors, their excerpts dissected and analyzed.

Bonus Lecture from a Police Detective: Body Language in the Police and Criminal Worlds—Interrogations, Spotting Criminals, Hostage Negotiations

WELCOME

TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS:

Helen Robertson from Auckland

Kura Carpenter from Mosgiel

Ngapera Stewart from Miramar

Jasmine Lane from Melbourne

Rowena O'Sullivan from Auckland

Lynette Gautier from Auckland

Rath Cawthorne from Auckland

Anna Fife from Sydney

Fiona Penman from Christchurch

From The Pres.



All the buzz happening in RWNZ!

President Abby Gaines gives us the latest news from the Exec and updates from the 2011 Conference Committee.

Have you registered for *Love & Other Crimes*, RWNZ's 2011 conference yet? I just did, using our new online registration form—super-easy and efficient—which you'll find, along with a host of other great conference information, at www.romancewriters.co.nz/conference. You can also print off a hard-copy version of the form if you like to do things the old-fashioned way! Earlybird registration prices are in effect until July 11, but this year is rocketing by so fast, that date will be upon us before we know it—followed quickly by the conference itself, which runs August 19-21 at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Auckland. Remember, if you're wanting to pitch your book to an editor or literary agent, those slots are allocated on a first-in, first-served basis. You'll be kicking yourself if you miss out because you register too late!

In this issue of *Heart to Heart*, you'll see a near-complete list of the conference workshops and main sessions. I won't go into detail in this column—I just want to remind you that *Love & Other Crimes* comprises three full days of workshops and main session talks, plus several social events, and this year you don't have to choose your breakout workshops before the event.

As always, we're keen to secure raffle prizes, goody bag items and sponsorship contributions for our conference. Our aim is to keep the conference registration fee as low as possible—which means making up the inevitable shortfall between income and expenditure through raffles, contest fees etc. Yvonne Eve Walus has kindly volunteered to handle the raffles side—check out her call for prizes in this newsletter.

New RWNZ Contests

This issue brings you details of our three *First Impressions Contests*, designed to give your book a foot in the door with the editors and agents attending *Love & Other Crimes* (and to help raise money for the conference coffers). This year, Angela James (Carina Press), Jessica Faust (BookEnds Literary Agency) and Lucy Gilmour (Harlequin Mills & Boon) have all kindly agreed to judge contests. If you final, and you attend conference, you'll get some direct feedback on your work from the editor or agent—last year's finalists found that meeting with an editor who'd already read their work offered a valuable advantage over a "cold" pitch. Whether you're attending conference or not, you still have the chance to wow the editor or agent with your work, and hopefully garner one of those precious requests for a full manuscript. Please note, unlike other RWNZ contests, you won't receive comments on your work from the first-round (RWNZ member) judges—a fact reflected in the low entry fee—but as I've said before... and I think it bears saying again: so many RWNZ members have sold their first book as a result of finalling in a contest, it's really worthwhile to enter.

Huge thanks to Tessa Radley for teeing up our agent and editor judges, to Iona Jones and Ellie Huse for masterminding the design of these contests, and to Viv Constable and Kamy

Chetty for refining the details and working out the coordination.

While we're on the subject of contests... Good luck to everyone who entered the Great Beginnings... and to all those Clendon Award entrants who'll be on tenterhooks over the next couple of months waiting to hear if they finalled! Been there, done that, well aware of both the highs and the lows!

Wishing you some inspired writing in the run-up to conference. ♥♥

WHAT CAN WE DO?

With Christchurch so desperately in need of every possible kind of support, from prayers to housing, everyone would like to help in some way.

Which leads to the question—"What can RWNZ do?"

Rather than simply make an executive decision, RWNZ would like to hear your thoughts and suggestions. So put your thinking cap on and come up with some ideas and then send them to me to collate.

Suggestions can cover anything—
from specific support for our members
to general support for Christchurch itself.

From there we can make a decision on what to do.

Send your ideas and thoughts to angelique@kiwiwriter.co.nz

Alternatively if you see me on skype on angelique_jurd, yell out and we can have a chat.

RWNZ CONTEST SCHEDULE 2011

CHAPTER SHORT STORY CONTEST
Judging In Progress

HMB GREAT BEGINNINGS CONTEST
Closed Friday, 15 April 2011
Good luck everyone!

STRICTLY SINGLE CONTEST
Closes Friday, 23 September 2011

Final Judge:
Alex Logan, Grand Central Publishing
Agent Judge:
Elaine Spencer, The Knight Agency
(Entry information is available on RWNZ's website.)

If you have any questions, contact
Viv Constable, Contests Coordinator:
vconstable@xtra.co.nz



Woos, Hoos, and News

Celebrating our members' achievements.

Tyree Connor keeps us up-to-date with our successes here and overseas. Let her know yours at rocker.t@xtra.co.nz

AWARDS!

Anna Campbell's *My Reckless Surrender* was **voted Favourite Historical Romance of 2010** at the **Australian Romance Readers Association Awards**, and Anna was **voted Favourite Australian Romance Author of 2010**. Huge congratulations, Anna!

Sandra Hyatt has been **nominated** for *Mistletoe Magic* in the **Romance Novella** section of **The RITA's**! That's fantastic, Sandra!

Nalini Singh **won** the RT Readers Choice Award for **Best Shape Shifter Paranormal** for *Play of Passion*. Way to go, Nalini!

SALES!

Lorna Jean Roberts has **signed a contract** for *Chasing Cassie*, her second story with Ellora's Cave.

Faye Robertson has **sold an e-novella** called *Something Blue* to Samhain Publishing. Release 31 May.

Faye Robertson has also **sold her first full-length book**, *White-Hot Christmas*, to Samhain.

Yvonne Lindsay has received **a two-book contract** from HM&B, and has had a **continuity book confirmed** for next year.

SUCCESSES!

Lisa Chaplin has **finalled** in the **Historical** section of the **Valley Forge Sheila Contest**. Her entry is on its way to Holly Blanck at St Martin's Press. Everything crossed for you, Lisa!!!

Susanna Rogers has **finalled** in the **Mainstream with Romantic Elements** category of the **Cleveland Rocks Romance Contest** and in the **Romantic Suspense** category of the **Valley Forge Sheila Contest**. Her manuscript is on its way to editors at St Martin's Press and Berkley.

Rebecca Skrabl has **finalled** in the **Winter Rose Paranormal Contest** with her entry *The Devil of Whitechapel*.

Sue Webb has **placed second** in the **Historical** section of the **Linda Howard Award of Excellence**.

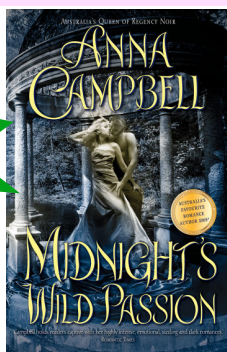
Kendra Delugar has **placed third** in the **Series Contemporary** section of the **Linda Howard Award of Excellence**.

Kamy Chetty **won** an on-line pitch to **HM&B Medical** and they've *requested her first three chapters*!!

Chris Taylor was one of six successful applicants for the **Mainstream/Historical** pod at the **RWAustralia five-day intensive mentoring workshop** in Brisbane.

Joan O'Dea has received funding to write an account of her father who was a pioneer aviator in Levin in the 1930s. Not romance, but definitely historical!

NEW RELEASES



Midnight's Wild Passion
Anna Campbell
Release: May, 2011
Harper Collins Australia



Kiwi Kiss
Cherie Le Clare
Release: 4 May, 2011
The Wild Rose Press

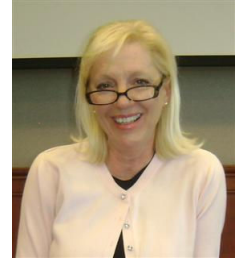


Soldier On Her Doorstep
Soraya Lane
Release: UK June, 2011
Harlequin Romance

You know you're among writers when...
the choice of calling it penis / manhood / arousal / or [much worse!] is a serious topic of conversation.

Kris Pearson

Writing the Best Body Language And Dialogue Cues



Powering up your readers' emotions.

*In this two-part series psychologist and author **Margie Lawson** reveals some tricks of the trade.*

I love teaching writers how to create their best, best, best writing. Writing that draws the reader in so deep, that when the POV character's heart races, the reader clutches their own chest.

Best writing carries specificity and clarity. It carries nuanced power in its structure and style. It carries a compelling cadence in every sentence that drives the reader from the first word to the last.

Best writing cuts words that readers skim, and adds words that increase power.

Writing body language and dialogue cues at The Best level pushes writers beyond using at-the-ready basics and beat-fillers. Best writing doesn't use words and phrases that are predictable, overused, clichéd. Best writing is fresh writing.

Overview of Body Language and Dialogue Cues

Research indicates a whopping ninety-plus percent of all communication messages are nonverbal. Less than ten percent of communication can be attributed to the words.

What's the implication for writers? The odds are good that writers need more body language on the page, and more body language that carries psychological power.

Most writers fall into patterns on the page. They write variations of sentences about glances, looks, lips, mouths, eyebrows, foreheads, and rate and tone and volume of the character's voice... They need to know the full range of body language and dialogue cues—and use them.

Writers need to be kinesics specialists. They need to be experts at reading body language, experts at writing nuanced body language on the page.

Writers need to remember that body language emphasizes or contradicts what is said.

People always believe the body

language, even when it contradicts the verbal message.

Body language includes:

Haptics—communication by touch and gestures;

Kinesics—communicating by body movement;

Proxemics—communicating with positioning and spatial relationships;

Facial Expressions—including eyes, lips, mouth, full face, flicker-face, deception cues.

Imagine all those nonverbal messages displayed continuously—in a series of stimuli and responses—through facial expressions, eyes, lips and mouths, flicker-face emotions, gestures, movements, shifts in spatial relationships, postural changes, and touching and hugging and sighing and shrugging...

Approximately thirty-five percent of nonverbal communication is conveyed through the subtext of speech. In real life that subtext, how we interpret what's said, is called **paralanguage**.

Dialogue Cue is the term I coined to describe paralanguage on the page. A Dialogue Cue shares the subtext regarding how the dialogue is delivered. It informs the reader how to interpret the dialogue. Dialogue cues are one part of writing nonverbal communication. They're one part writers often overlook.

A Dialogue Cue may serve as a dialogue tag by tagging who said which words. But a Dialogue Cue is *not* just a dialogue tag.

A Dialogue Cue is more specialized than a tag. A Dialogue Cue refers to how the words are spoken.

A Dialogue Cue conveys the Tone, Inflection, Pitch, Quality, Volume, or Rate of the dialogue.

How can writers write **the best** body language and dialogue cues?

I'll use examples to show and tell. First, we'll dive into a Deep Editing Analysis.

Second, we'll explore some examples of body language. Third, we'll dive into dialogue cues.

Two of my biggest gifts to writers are teaching them to think like psychologists, and teaching them how to capture that psychologically-based power on their pages. I've developed dozens of deep editing tips and techniques that teach writers how to psychologically empower their writing.

FYI: This article addresses a miniscule sliver on writing body language and dialogue cues.

If you want to hone your deep editing skills and expand your writing body language and dialogue cues repertoire, please consider taking an on-line course. These two Deep Editing Analyses provide a glimpse into my lectures and teaching style. My month-long on-line courses each have over 300 pages of lectures.

Deep Editing Analysis:

Lisa Unger, *Black Out*:

New York Times and international bestselling author, **Lisa Unger**, writes adrenaline-driven literary thrillers. Reviewers describe her writing as masterful, riveting, evocative. All three of Lisa Unger's thrillers—*Beautiful Truth*, *A Sliver of Truth*, and *Black Out*—garnered starred reviews from Publisher's Weekly.

Example:

I see a flash of something on her face that I've never seen before. It happens when our eyes connect through the thick glass of her front door. It's just the ghost of an expression, and in another state of mind I might not even have noticed it. It's fear. Vivian is the strongest woman I've ever known, and when I see the look on her face, my heart goes cold.

Analysis:

If you've taken my *Empowering Characters' Emotions* course (or Lecture Packets), you know flicker-face

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Contests and Markets

P.D.R. Lindsay-Salmon shares some potential markets and Rachel Collins suggests a few contests.

Potential Markets

Total-E-Bound Publishing

Royalty paying, full-service ePubublisher.

Editor Lisa Cox, seeks erotic romance as m/m, m/f, and ménage novels (up to 125,000 words), and novellas (10,000 to 20,000 words). Also seeking short stories for two anthologies, with deadlines 1 June, 2011 and 1 July, 2011.

Guidelines: www.total-e-bound.com/submissionguidelines.asp?

Details: www.total-e-bound.com

Email: submissions@totalebound.com

Pyr, an imprint of Prometheus Books

Pyr® is a science fiction and fantasy imprint seeking novels, 100,000 to 130,000 words.

Guidelines: <http://www.pyrsf.com/contactus.html>

Details: www.pyrsf.com

The Corner Club Press

E-zine seeking short stories up to 7,000 words.

Guidelines: <http://www.thecornerclubpress.com/submission-guidelines.html>

Details: <http://thecornerclubpress.com>

Email: submissions@thecornerclubpress.com

RuneWright Anthologies

'Holiday Spirit & Mayhem—Vol. One: Holiday Seasons Greetings' Seeking short stories, 2,000 to 7,500 words about 'Winter Holidays'.

Deadline: 10 October, 2011

'Best Served Cold—Vol. One: An Eye for an Eye'

Seeking short stories of 2,000 to 7,500 words about Vengeance & Retribution.

Deadline: 15 June, 2011

'Hallows Eve—Vol. One: Tribute to the Legend of Samhain'

Seeking stories, 2,000 to 7,500 words, about vengeance and retribution at Hallow's Eve.

Deadline: 20 July, 2011

Guidelines: <http://www.runewright.com/guidelines.html>

Details: <http://www.runewright.com>

Long and Short Reviews.com

The Long and the Short of It and its fellow erotica site, *Whipped Cream*, are looking for short, romantic fiction.

Details: <http://www.longandshortreviews.com>

Submissions: <http://www.longandshortreviews.com/submissions.htm>

You know you're among writers when...

you talk about hearing voices in your head
and people nod instead of reaching for a straitjacket.

Kendra Delugar

Overseas Contests

2011 MAGGIE

Deadline: 10 June, 2011

Eligibility: Unpublished

Enter: Synopsis and first chapter up to 35 pages

Fee: \$25/30

<http://www.georgiaromancewriters.org/the-maggies>

The 2011 Colorado Gold Writing Contest

Deadline: 1 June, 2011

Eligibility: Unpublished

Enter: First 20 pages and 8-page synopsis

Fee: \$30

<http://www.rmfwcontest.com/>

Lone Star Writing Competition

Deadline: 8 June, 2011

Eligibility: Unpublished in category entering

Enter: First 25 pages

Fee: \$20/25

http://www.nwhrwa.com/2011_Contest_Page.htm

Indiana Golden Opportunity

Deadline: 15 July, 2011

Eligibility: Unpublished

Enter: 35 pages—opening chapter/s and synopsis

Fee: \$25

<http://www.indianarwa.com/igo-rules/>

The Catherine (formerly the Original Golden Opportunity Contest)

Deadline: 1 June, 2011, 11:59 pm EST

Eligibility: Unpublished writers

Enter: 30 pages total, including synopsis

Fee: \$25

www.torontoromancewriters.com/contest.html

Heart of Excellence Readers Choice Award

Deadline: 15 June, 2011

Eligibility: Open to RWA members with books having an original copyright date of 2010 or First US Printing date of 2010 from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2010

Entry: Include 3 signed copies of each entry. (Book length, at least 50K, e-books are accepted in bound, hard copy.)

Fee: \$20

www.acrarwa.org

2011 Published Beacon Contest

Deadline: Postmark 30 June, 2011

Eligibility: Published

Enter: Books with a 2010 copyright date

Fee: \$25

www.firstcoastromancewriters.com

(Conflict From Character...cont. from page 1)

Physical: A lot of times I throw a couple of attributes at my characters. Hair color, eyes, tall or short. But the important details about our characters' physical appearance are not how they look, but how they *feel* about how they look. Does she have her mother's hair and hate it? Does she have her father's eyes and love it? In my February Superromance *His Wife For One Night*, my heroine, Mia, has a noticeably large chest. But she's a hard-working rancher who hates calling attention to herself and has **no clue** what to do with her femininity. This chest, which most women would delight in, she loathes.

All of us are hung up on some aspect of our looks. For instance, why oh *why* do I have my father's build? He was a linebacker, for crying out loud! But, oddly enough, I am partial to the small mole on my nose that all the women in my mother's family have. Think about your character's physicality and use it to create conflict.

Social: Our heroines usually have friends. And who they are as friends tells the reader a lot about them. I am a huge fan of the show *House*, and House's friendship with Wilson is so complex and difficult that it adds a fantastic dimension to his character. Is your character a good friend? Bad? Selfish? Too giving? Too needy? I, like most of the world these days, am totally addicted to the JR Ward books. And who the vampires are to each other is a bigger deal to the reader than who the vampires are to the love interests. Because each and every one of them is an Alpha male, they are all kind of the same in the love relationship but very different in the friendship relationship.

In trying to create well-rounded characters you have to give them some flaws. They can't be good employees, wonderful daughters, caring friends, and generous lovers. Sometimes they have to fail, and be selfish, and make mistakes. And sometimes they have to be bitches. Just like the rest of us.

Psychological: This is where things get interesting. What does your character want? Love? Fear? What do they desire? Usually the answer to this comes in two parts and is tied directly to their internal and external conflict. She wants to save her home from the developers (external) but really she just wants to belong (internal). She wants to get revenge on the vampire that killed her father (external), but really she just wants to have her father back, just for a

few minutes (internal). In my first Bantam contemporary romance, *Can't Buy Me Love* out next summer my heroine, Tara Jean Sweet, wants to get the pink cowboy boots she designed into every Nordstrom's store in the Southwest (external) but really she just wants security (internal).

Another one of my favorite movies is *Field of Dreams* (I know, my movie tastes make me sound like a seventy-year-old man). In it, Kevin Costner is going to build a baseball field to prove that he's nothing like his father (external) but really all he wants is another chance to share something with his father (internal).

And finally, closely tied to the psychological question is the **why**? The backstory. Lots of writers mistreat backstory. Instead of using it like gunpowder in those moments in your story when you want emotion and drama and conflict to explode, lots of writers dump it into the beginning, because they think there's no way the reader will understand the characters without knowing the damage that motivates them.

This is very untrue. Readers love clues. They love hints. They love trying to find the answer to questions. Pages turn because readers are **dying** to know why your gorgeous hero refuses to commit or is scared of bunnies.

Romance writers love to rough up their character's history. Abuse, war, divorce, vampire bites, you name it, we use it. But the really good writers use those things that happen in the character's past to create conflict in their present.

I also would advise that any work you do on your heroine, you also do on your hero and *vice versa*. No reader wants a lopsided romance. It's totally natural to love one character more than another in your books, but try very hard to make them equal. Give your favorite character someone good to fight for and fall in love with. That creates satisfying romance. And giving characters conflict as individuals will guarantee more conflict between them as you work out your plot and romance.

Readers, editors, and agents want conflict on every page and the only way to make that happen is to make sure your characters bring it with them. ♥♥

Molly O'Keefe has always known she wanted to be a writer (except when she wanted to be a florist or a chef and the

Request for Raffle Prizes

Imagine...
a basket of goodies
wrapped in cellophane
and decorated with a tasteful ribbon.
Mysterious.
Magical.
Imagine winning one at the Conference.
Magnificent!
Meanwhile,
imagine...
contributing something to the raffle.
A suitcase full of books?
Those three bottles of wine
you've had since Christmas?
Or that fabulous makeup set
you've seen on special
at Smith and Caughey's?
This year, as every year,
the Conference Committee
is relying on your generosity
to make our raffles memorable.
Please contact Yvonne
on
yve@xtra.co.nz or (09) 483-8411
if you'd like to contribute.

You know you're among writers when...

you say
"My partner's going away for the week!"
and
everyone understands your excitement.

Better still,
they know this doesn't mean
you're having an affair...

Maggie Le Page

brief period of time when she considered being a cowgirl). And once she got her hands on some romances, she knew exactly what she wanted to write. She published her first Harlequin romance at age twenty-five and hasn't looked back. She loves exploring every character's road towards happily ever after.

When she's not at the park or cleaning up the toy room, Molly is working hard on her next novel, trying to exercise, stalking Tina Fey on the internet, and dreaming of the day she can finish a cup of coffee without interruption.

Dishing It Out, her last Harlequin Flipside won the Romantic Times Reviewers Choice award for best Flipside, in 2005. Her Superromance *Baby Makes Three* won the RT Reviewer's Choice for best Superromance in 2006, and her novella, "The Christmas Eve Promise" in *The Night Before Christmas* was nominated for a RITA in 2009.

You can visit Molly at <http://www.molly-okeefe.com/index.html>



Character Arcs & Plots

How much do you need to know before you start?

*Fantasy writer **Janice Hardy** answers a reader's question on character motivations.*

Is the writer supposed to know where the character is heading/motives before the first draft? In this particular ms I know where he's at in the beginning and what he wants, but I really don't know the progression yet. Is that a bad thing?

Heck no. For a lot of writers, that journey is the reason they write the book in the first place. Even for a structure gal like me, I often have only a bare idea of where the character is going to end up. A lot of my revision plan is spent filling in the motivational gaps and fleshing out the character growth.

A character arc is the internal struggle and progress your character goes through over the course of the novel that changes them in some way. It's usually connected to the internal conflict so that what they do (plot) forces changes in who they are. It can sometimes be confused with character motivations (a character worries over something so they act to prevent that something) but *why a character acts* is different from *how they change because of their actions*. Motivation drives the actions. Growth is the result of the actions.

That said, it is a little easier if you have some inkling of where you want to go, because you'll have some direction and won't just write willy-nilly. While there's nothing wrong with willy-nilly, it's not for everyone. If you have a theme, you might know your protag needs to learn the meaning of love or that revenge is best cold or how puppies make life better. If you know you want them to learn a certain lesson, you can angle the story that way. If you know they need to end up at Point B, you can

start them off right in Point A. You may not know the path of that journey, but you'll head in the right direction to get there.

I would recommend trying your best to figure out why the protag wants what they want, because that'll go a long way to understand what's at stake. A story with no stakes is a pretty dull story, even if it's filled with technically exciting scenes. If there's nothing to lose, there's little fun in seeing if they win. If the only reason your protag is acting is because you told them to, there's a good chance you'll hit that wall around page 100 and not know what happens next.

Character arcs in general can take many forms. Some folks plot them out just like, well, plot, and know every step a character needs to take to reach their end state. Others let them run and see where they go. Both are acceptable ways to do it.

I've always been a "let's see where they go" kind of writer for character arcs, but with the new spy novel, the protag's arc is a major deal, so I'm doing a bit more pre-planning this time. I'm still leaving it open enough to be spontaneous in the writing, but I'm laying out a more defined path similarly to how I craft the plot events. Here are some of the things I've been thinking about:

Things to Think About When Creating Character Arcs

1. Where do you want them to end up?

Most novels end with the protag undergoing some kind of growth, but not every protag needs to. Long series often keep the protag as is, since the enjoyment is coming back to an old friend. But if the whole point of the book is to undergo some kind of change, then knowing that change will help get you there. And even in a series I still think it's a good idea to have some growth. Watching a character make the same mistakes all the time gets old fast and they lose all credibility.

2. How much do they need to suffer

to achieve this change?

Nobody changes just for the fun of it. Something made them reevaluate their behavior and they realized they needed to make a change or else. Sometimes the suffering is minor if the change is small, like realizing they could be a bit more polite when dealing with co-workers. But for real change you need real incentives. So if your protag is going to evolve in a major way, the events that forced that change are likely to be equally major.

3. Who or what brings about that change?

This helps a lot in the plotting department. Arcs often involved showing the protag doing the behavior you want to change and having it turn out badly for them. Eventually, they'll do the right thing and be rewarded. They don't do this on their own. Someone or something does something to them to make them change. It's not always the same thing, but many things happen to make your character take a hard look at themselves and their life.

4. Change works both ways

Negative reinforcement might gain positive results, but bad things can also push your protag away from the change you want them to have. It's a dark moment event, where they backslide and wonder if it's all worth it. There might be some bad times ahead before that change occurs.

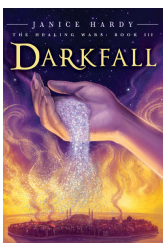
5. Not all growth is good growth.

If they backslide, they might rebel or do something that does indeed grow their character but not the way they probably should. They might lash out, do something just because they know they shouldn't. They might act the opposite of what they know is the right way, to show they don't have to do things someone else's way.

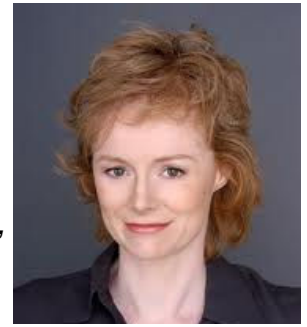
6. How does the change reflect your premise or theme?

Odds are the arc is going to connect to your theme or premise in some way.

(Continued on page 9)



Creating Secondary Characters



How do you tag a character quickly in the reader's mind?

NYT bestselling author **Eloisa James** shows us how to be “spare, exact, and imaginative”.

It's a truth known to every author that the only thing better than beginning a book is ending one. The book that I see in my mind, before writing, is a heart-breakingly wonderful, intricate yet clear novel that will make its readers sigh with joy... The first chapters are all panic, excitement and pleasure. Anything could happen. All sorts of things do.

Yet even in the midst of all that frenzy, I still need to set up a whole world—and that takes some work. Lately I've been thinking how hard it is to create a quick image of a character that will stick in the reader's mind.

Romance writers can—and must—always lovingly describe every muscle the hero has to his name, or the heroine's silky lashes, silky hair, silky breasts... all of it. There's a great poem by Andrew Marvell, “*To His Coy Mistress*”, telling his beloved that he would love to praise her breasts for two hundred years:

*An hundred years should go to
praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead
gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast
But thirty thousand to the rest...*

Raise your hand if it sometimes feels as if you're giving a hundred years to each breast and two hundred for the rest!

(Character Arcs...continued from page 8)

Character growth is a great vehicle for illustrating theme. So what are you trying to say with your story on a more conceptual level?

Nothing says you have to know all of these things going in. You don't even have to do all of them. But they should get you started on thinking about how your character arcs can help you plot. These are the ‘whys’ that make those ‘what’s’ happen.♥♥

A long-time fantasy reader, Janice Hardy always wondered about the darker side of healing. For her fantasy trilogy *The*

The problem is that all that busy reporting doesn't leave much time to describe secondary characters—even though they are integral to a story line. No matter the kind of novel you're writing, its world must be peopled with more than the main characters. I was looking around for help the other day and came across Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*. She does it brilliantly.

Here's a priest: “*a wrinkled, elderly man with a hairless face and brown, dead curly hair that looked like a wig.*”

And a girl: “*Ruth Bent had red-dish-brown frizzy hair... her voice was deep, like a man's; her skin was swarthy and freckled... she had a good figure, small, with a sort of shimmying movement to it.*”

My current manuscript, a version of *The Princess and the Pea*, is a stand-alone, which means it doesn't have an already-established cast; I have to introduce a variety of people quickly and make them stick in the readers' mind.

The heroine's mother is essential to the plot. So here she is: “*Mrs. Lytton ate like a bird and ruthlessly confined what curves she had in a whalebone corset. Consequently, she looked like a stork with anxious, beady eyes and a particularly feathery head.*”

I'm using a simile there, just as McCarthy did with the priest (Mrs.

Lytton looks “like a stork”). Similes are easy and fun; it's a bit more difficult to pin someone down without a simile. Here's my introduction of a duke:

“A particularly observant person might have noticed that the duke's nose entered the room first. He had a magnificent knob in the front, a doorknocker of a nose. But he made it work. Olivia rather thought that it was the way he held his head high and his chin forward. He looked as if his presence was the only thing that made other people visible.”

Here I've created the character through Olivia's point-of-view, rather than through the narrator's description.

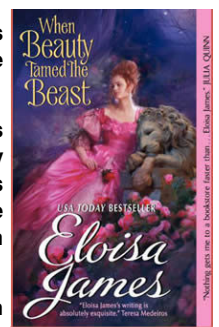
My best advice regarding character description is to write a long description of a given character. Then cut it down and down until you have something spare, exact, and imaginative. Something that instantly tags the character in the reader's mind.

My version of *The Princess and the Pea* looks likely to be published in December, 2011. If you read it, please shoot me an email and let me know what you think of my characters (and their descriptions)! ♥♥

Eloisa James writes historical romance for Harper Collins.

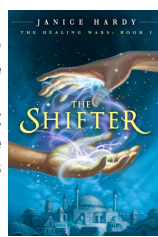
A New York Times bestseller many times over, Eloisa is also a Shakespeare professor at Fordham University.

For more information about Eloisa and her work, visit her at www.eloisajames.com



Healing Wars, she tapped into her own dark side to create a world where healing was dangerous, and those with the best intentions often made the worst choices. Her books include *The Shifter*, and *Blue Fire Darkfall*, the final book of the trilogy, is due out October 4, 2011. She lives in Georgia with her husband, three cats and one very nervous freshwater eel. You can visit her online at www.janicehardy.com or chat with her about writing on her blog, *The Other Side of the Story*.

<http://blog.janicehardy.com/search/label/characters>



Endow your protagonist and other characters with passion for their lives and for what they are seeking; use deep listening to “harvest” your own feelings to create authenticity when you revise.

From *Manuscript Makeover*
by
Elizabeth Lyon



Love & Other Crimes

ROMANCE WRITERS OF NEW ZEALAND

CONFERENCE AUGUST 19TH - 21ST 2011

Sponsored by  **HARLEQUIN®**

MAIN SESSION TALKS

Saturday

In addition to the **Cold Read** early morning workshop and two breakout workshops, Saturday's conference session includes the following presentations:

- New York Times-bestselling author **Tess Gerritsen** keynote address (topic TBA).
- **Lucy Gilmour**, Editor, Harlequin Mills & Boon, **Spotlight on Harlequin**.
- **Bob Mayer** on **Conflict**—whether you're writing sweet romance or a gory thriller, layering strong conflict into a story is one of the biggest challenges writers face—all writers, all genres. Bob talks about how to identify a deep-rooted conflict you can sustain over the length of your book, keeping readers on the edge of their seats.
- **Jessica Faust** spotlights BookEnds Literary Agency—how the agency works, who's who, what they're looking for, and what the agency is experiencing in the current market.
- Bonus Published Author Breakout Workshop with **Bob Mayer**—**Guerilla Tactics for Surviving the E-Publishing Jungle**—Bob talks about how authors can harness digital publishing to maximise their incomes.
- The day will end with the **RWNZ Annual General Meeting**, which all members are invited to attend.

Sunday

In addition to the breakout workshop, Sunday's conference session includes the following:

- **Dystopia** with **Maria Snyder**—Dystopian fiction is hot, hot, hot—just take a look at the bestseller lists! Maria V. Snyder, author of the *Insiders* dystopian series, talks about why dystopia is so popular and how to make it work.
- **TBA**—Editor talk
- **Harlequin: Let's Do Lunch**—Harlequin hosts RWNZ delegates at a special lunch.
- **Hook 'Em** with **Molly O'Keefe**—it's not just category romance novels that need a "hook" to reel in first the editor, then the reader. Molly O'Keefe gives practical tips for identifying and using hooks to make your story stand out.
- **Cristina Lee**—Sales and Marketing Director, **Harlequin Australia**.

Please note, timings and content are subject to change.

*(And, because we're considering dystopia)
Coleridge was a drug addict. Poe was an alcoholic.
Marlowe was killed by a man whom he was treacherously trying to stab.
Pope took money to keep a woman's name out of a satire then wrote a piece so that she could still be recognized anyhow.
Chatterton killed himself. Byron was accused of incest.
Do you still want to be a writer? And if so, why?
Bennett Cerf*

Friday Programme Reminder

7am-8:15am: Friday First—Cold Read Workshops

Bring along the first two pages of your manuscript to be read aloud (not by you!) to an editor / agent for comment and critique. Confirmed: Jessica Faust, BookEnds Literary Agency. TBA: editor.

9am-5pm: Bob Mayer—One-Day Novel Writing Seminar

Join New York Times best-selling writer Bob Mayer for an all-day workshop on writing the novel, beginning with the original idea and core conflict, developing plot and character, working with point of view, pulling everything together, selling your book, and the business of writing.

1:00pm-5:45pm Writing Fantasy and Paranormal with New York Times-bestselling author Maria V. Snyder

For more details about Friday and other conference-related info, visit

www.romancewriters.co.nz/conference

For a more in-depth coverage of the Friday workshops see last month's Heart To Heart.



SATURDAY BREAKOUT WORKSHOPS

Saturday Starters: "Cold Read" Workshops

7am-8:15am: A bonus workshop for all you earlybirds! Bring along the first two pages of your manuscript to be read aloud (not by you!) to an editor / agent for comment and critique. There will be two "cold read" sessions on Saturday:

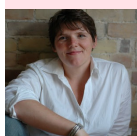
Lucy Gilmour, Harlequin Mills & Boon *or* **Angela James**, Carina Press

Saturday Breakout One



Special Forces—Bob Mayer: New York Times bestselling author and former special ops (Green Beret) A-team commander Bob Mayer lifts the lid on Special Forces. What do those guys really do... and what can they get away with? Soak up the details you need to turn your fictional depiction of covert operations into compelling, credible reading.

or



Giving Them What They Don't Want (Putting Conflict on Every Page)—Molly O'Keefe: If your book doesn't have deep, believable conflict from the first page to the last, you're in trouble. Let RITA-winning author Molly O'Keefe lead you through exercises that'll help you develop and use conflict to reveal character and advance your plot.

or

Ask an Agent—Jessica Faust, BookEnds Literary Agency: What do agents look for in a great submission? How does the author-agent relationship work? What can an agent do for you (and what can't she do)? What's hot, and what's not? This is your chance to ask questions of one of the industry's most approachable and savvy agents.

or

Published Authors Only:*



The Sharp End—Tess Gerritsen: New York Times bestselling thriller author Tess Gerritsen answers questions about the business of being a writer.

Saturday Breakout Two

Thrill Me, Chill Me—Tess Gerritsen: New York Times bestselling thriller author Tess Gerritsen is arguably one of the most qualified people in the world to talk about the thriller genre. Learn the key elements to writing a thriller, how to weave in a romance, how to craft a story that will keep readers biting their nails to the very end.

or

Writing Paranormal—Maria V. Snyder: New York Times bestselling author of paranormal fiction for adults and young adults Maria V. Snyder looks at how to write stand-out paranormal fiction in a market that seems saturated by vampires, shapeshifters and faeries.



or

Carriages and Carriage Driving Through the Ages—Vicky English: Barouche, landau, hackney, coach or... ? Build authenticity into your historical novel—Vicky English shares how carriages and driving techniques have changed through history, right down to how drivers treated their horses and various rigs, and what they wore. Vicky English has driven, judged, competed in and won carriage-driving competitions in the USA and NZ. She is the former president of a regional carriage driving association in the USA.

or

Published Authors Only*: **It's a Digital World—Angela James, Carina Press:** Angela James was in e-publishing before many of us even knew it existed. Your chance to hear her views and ask your questions about the technologies, the market, and what's in it for authors.

SUNDAY BREAKOUT WORKSHOPS

Medical Alert—Lucy Gilmour (Mills & Boon editor) and Sue MacKay: Mills & Boon Medicals is an enduringly popular romance series—one that many RWNZ members would love to sell to. Here's your chance to hear from an editor and an author about how to create a great Medical romance.

or

Bob Mayer—Nailing the Synopsis: Why does writing a 2-5 page synopsis seem harder than writing a book? Bob Mayer addresses the challenge of boiling your story down to its essence—how to write a synopsis that will wow an editor, accurately reflect your story, and provide a tool that will help you finish your book.

or

TBA—Editor Workshop

or

Published Authors Only*: **Everything You Wanted to Know But Were Afraid to Ask—Jessica Faust, BookEnds Literary Agency:** Jessica Faust invites published authors to ask her anything at all about the industry. Your chance to discuss sneaky contract clauses, the changing role of the agent, and trends in popular fiction.

Please note, workshop timings and content are subject to change.

*Published Author Workshops are open only to authors published in book-length fiction.

RWNZ “FIRST IMPRESSIONS” CONTESTS

First Impressions No. 1

Final Judge: Jessica Faust
(BookEnds Literary Agency)

First Impressions No. 2

“Royal Weddings and Other Fairy Tales”
Final Judge: Lucy Gilmour
(HMB)

First Impressions No. 3

Final Judge: Angela James
(Carina Press)

Five finalists from each contest will win a 10-minute feedback/pitch session with the final judge of the contest/s in which they final. These sessions give finalists an advantage over a cold pitch appointment because the final judge will have already read the entry.
(Note: Finalists not registered for the Conference will not be eligible to attend a pitch/feedback session)

Entry Information:

All three contests will be by **electronic entry only**.

Opening Date: 3 June, 2011

Closing Date: 24 June, 2011

Eligibility: All three contests are open to published and unpublished RWNZ members.

Submit:

- The first 1000 words (max) of your manuscript ***
- Plus a 150-word (maximum) back cover blurb

(A completed manuscript is not required).

***All three contests are open to category or single title manuscripts; however, entries in First Impressions No. 2 must have a royal wedding or fairy tale theme (See examples below).

No. of Entries: Up to two entries per entrant accepted in each contest.

Entry Fee: \$NZ10—a separate fee is payable for each entry in each contest.

Scoring: Entrants will receive their scores ONLY. There will be NO written feedback from first-round judges. Each entry will be read by two judges, and a discrepancy judge will be used when scores differ by 15 points or more and/or in the case of tied scores.

All entry information and entry forms available on the website.

PLEASE READ INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY AND, IF IN DOUBT,

EMAIL THE CONTEST MANAGER **BEFORE** YOU SUBMIT YOUR ENTRY OR ENTRIES.

Three of RWNZ's authors offer examples of stories with fairy tale themes...

'Married by Mistake', by Abby Gaines, is a Cinderella story with a put-upon heroine who wants to escape her demanding family. At 'the ball'—on a reality TV show—she ends up mistakenly married to the 'handsome prince'. The book ends with a real ball, complete with someone dressed up as a 17th century Prince Charming. If you're interested in seeing how Cinderella can translate into a Superromance, *'Married by Mistake'* is currently available as a free download at www.tryharlequin.com

'Mr Unforgettable', by Karina Bliss, is a sleeping beauty story about a widow waking up to her sensuality two years after her husband's death. Having had the perfect marriage, the mayor isn't open to another love. Instead, she embarks on a no-strings affair with a man burned by a bitter divorce. When she falls for him, this Sleeping Beauty must convince her prince to take his heart out of cryonic storage.

'His Bride for the Taking', by Sandra Hyatt, is a play on Shrek (or Tristan and Isolde), in which the hero, Prince Rafael, has to escort the woman meant for his older brother back to his country. He certainly didn't intend to fall for a woman who was strictly off limits.

Also by Sandra Hyatt, is *'Falling for the Princess'* (out in July/August), in which the hero, Logan, is an American commoner (though it's a Desire, so he's not exactly poor) who, as the title suggests, falls for a princess. Referencing Cinderella, the book ends with the hero arriving at the ball on the stroke of midnight.

Contests—Why Being a Finalist Counts!

Soraya Lane shares her own contest experience.

It took me ten manuscripts and around six years of serious writing to sell to Harlequin Romance, and during that time I entered contest after contest. Sometimes I scored well, other times my score sheets were dismal, but I kept on entering. Why? Because if I finalled, my work would be read by an editor or agent, and it meant avoiding the slush pile.

At last year's conference I was still unpublished, and it was starting to hurt like hell. I had been working so hard, writing furiously whenever I could, and receiving good feedback from editors and agents. I felt so close, but I was still receiving rejections. I was desperate to

be published, and yet it felt like it was never going to happen.

Before the conference, I had entered the "Meet the Agent" contest. It's probably time to point out that our conference agent last year, and judge of the contest, was Laura Bradford from the Bradford Literary Agency. She had long been on my top ten list of agents, and I personally felt that to succeed in a long-term career as an author, I would need a great agent behind me. So when I found out I was a finalist, I was thrilled. That meant an extended pitch session with Laura, in person, at the conference.

Meeting Laura felt like a real turning point for me. We clicked straight away

(Continued on page 16)

Things Your Mother Never Told You...



About Writing Contests, that is!

Trish Morey lets us into a few deep, dark secrets.

Want a cheap and foolproof way to learn more about your own writing and how to improve it? Like to know how editors can spot a good manuscript at fifty paces (without reading fifty pages)? Want to help RWNZ and other writers (but don't necessarily want those writers knowing where you live?)

Then don't just enter contests—offer to judge them! BUT learn the ins and outs of judging first.

Sound too good to be true? Actually, it's not.

Judging contests is one way you can help other writers while doing your own writing a favor as well. So if you've never thought about judging contests, or you have but you've written yourself off for any number of reasons, then think again—judging contests truly is a win-win situation.

What's in it for me?

Bottom line? Lots! This isn't just about feeling good, although I expect you'll get a nice inner glow from knowing you've helped your fellow members, especially when you receive a thank you card or three from those who appreciated your advice—then you'll be beaming from ear to ear. Even more so if they place, win or have their manuscript requested or published: you discovered a star!

But seriously, there is a wealth of stuff you'll learn about your own writing by reading the entries from other "will-be" authors. It's quite amazing, things that are flaws in your own writing yet you're too close to see, will leap out at you in someone else's manuscript. Plus ideas about how to fix them. It's all about that fresh eye and, once you've judged, that fresh eye comes in really handy with your own work. You start to become more critical—you can see what works and what doesn't.

Plus you'll appreciate what it's like to be an editor. People ask how editors can

make up their minds about a manuscript with only three chapters ("but the action only starts in chapter seven!") When you judge contests you'll see what the editor sees—a stack of entries/submissions, all vying for the same thing. And you'll notice exactly what the editor notices—some of those will grab you from the first paragraph, some the first page, others will be a struggle to get through while you look for the spark. I promise you'll go back to your own manuscript with a more critical eye after that and really want to make it stand out.

You will be helping your fellow writers. This is a good one. RWNZ is a terrific organization—it gives so much to its members by way of an informative and entertaining monthly newsletter, an annual conference that makes you feel so good it should be taxed, offering contests that can offer feedback and great prizes including the bonus of a quick read by an editor and with its great support through the NZRomance Yahoo group email list and other groups. If you've ever wondered how you can give something back to your organization, judging contests and helping your fellow members is a terrific and practical way.

And this one may be last but not least—judging contests gives you great insight into your competition. You actually get to see what you're up against as these are the same people submitting and looking to be published by the same houses. It can be quite an ego boost, seeing how far you've come when you recognize the mistakes you used to make when you started, but at the same time it can be daunting because it shows you how good the competition is and that you can't afford not to make your work shine if you want the editor to sit up and take notice.

Debunking The Myths

Of course, there are lots of reasons why you wouldn't be able to judge and I'm going to do my best to debunk

some of the favorites right now!

Sorry, I don't have the time

Time is precious. We all know that. The great thing about having more judges is that we all get asked to do less. Which means that when we do get asked to judge, we feel a heap better about it. You want us to feel good about having to judge your entries, don't you?

Seriously, we have fantastic judges, but yes, they're all busy people too and it's nice to share the load. I know it's not easy to find the time, but I'm guaranteeing you it's worth it.

And there's no obligation. No-one expects you to judge in every contest—if you're invited to judge in a particular contest then it's still up to you whether or not you can. But even helping out in one contest a year is a great contribution to our team effort.

I'm not qualified

Do you write romance? Do you read romance? Then you're qualified. You don't have to be published (though we certainly won't hold that against you). I found it so hard when I first started out judging contests—like who was I to judge? What did I know? But you know, even someone starting out will recognize that things aren't working, or that they are, or that this is the best thing they have ever read. No-one expects you to write an essay analyzing each point, but be honest, offer what advice you believe is constructive and you'll surprise yourself how much you can help someone else. And it's all anonymous—you won't know the author and they won't know you, not that you won't be fair or constructive anyway.

I don't know how

RWNZ has just the best score sheets. All you have to do is read the entry and answer the questions, it's really that simple. But score sheet or no, I promise you will recognize a fabulous read

(Continued on page 18)



How to Identify Problems in Your Story

A Published Author's Judging Perspective.

Madeline Hunter, two time RITA winner of twenty bestselling historical romances, gives us some things to look for when we're writing our next masterpiece.

Let me start by saying that I did not write my first novels in an analytical way. I went with the flow, followed my nose, flew by the seat of my pants, and hoped to heaven that something inside me made it all come out okay. Sometimes my intuitive method worked splendidly. And sometimes it didn't, and I slogged through extensive revisions to get it up to snuff.

Because I resisted analyzing my writing, I got nervous around people who talked craft. I spent years sure that my books lacked whatever craft point was being discussed. Half the time craft talk made no sense to me. (I still don't know what the heck a black moment is.) Then I began judging contests.

Lo and behold, when I read other writers' unpublished work, all that craft stuff made more sense. In some cases it made a lot of sense. I began to see patterns. I realized that a lot of writers fell into the same traps, and that a lot of manuscripts suffered from the same flaws. Including some of mine. Hence the "sometimes it didn't" up above.

So here is my bullet list of problems I watch out for now in my own manuscripts, as learned from judging. You might think about them too, as you plan a story and write it, or as you get it spruced up for the Golden Heart or some other contest. (This is geared to romance novels, but with a little adaptation it works for most stories.)

Is there enough conflict in the story?

I have a multi-hour workshop that I do on this topic now. Yes, she who hates talking craft goes around talking it *ad nauseum* on this single point. I developed the workshop because, hands down, this is the most frequent problem I see in unpublished manuscripts. It is also what gets mine in trouble sometimes, and I have learned the hard way how important a good conflict is.

A romance novel does not just need conflict, it needs a good, plausible conflict that is strong enough and

meaningful enough to keep the hero and heroine apart, even as they are having the hots for each other and as they are falling in love.

It can't be something that a conversation can solve, and it can't be a matter of willfulness or wound licking, in my opinion. It has to be bigger, and something important that keeps interfering in the HEA.

Without a meaningful conflict, problems develop. First, the book runs out of story about half way through, and the author ends up having to piece together small, contrived conflicts to limp to the end. Second, after the big consummation love scene, the romance arc will essentially be

Never compromise your story's originality, voice, or power in order to score higher in contests.

completed. After that big love scene there had better be something very significant getting in the way of HEA again, or the story is in trouble.

Is the hero believable?

There are female writers who can't write guys well. Some tend to make them sort of dumb. Some make them Neanderthals in their views of women. Both of these tendencies may reflect the men these writers have known, but it is important to make the hero better than what we may have known.

Then, some other writers feminize the hero. He gets uber-sensitive as the book progresses. He obsesses over his feelings in his lengthy thought life. He analyzes the heroine's every statement. He—well, you get the picture. Judging has taught me to really keep an eye on my hero, to make sure I don't do this to him as I fall in love with him.

Women obviously have a disadvantage in writing the male point of view, but it can be done. Try to become a man when you write the hero. Oh, yes you

can. Give it a shot. You need to think like a guy to write a believable guy. You need to be in a guy's head and see the world through a man's eyes.

Is the unfolding of the story fresh?

Some contest entries are imitative not only in story lines (there are only so many, right?) but in the way they tell the story. They rely heavily on predictable devices and derivative scenes. I have judged contest entries with this problem that were otherwise very professional in every way. The hard truth is that mastering craft will not get a contract if the resultant story follows an overused sub-genre template. To stand out, to get published, writers need to be creative, distinctive, and not take the easy, well trod path.

Is the development of the physical relationship realistic?

This goes with the last point below, because I am convinced that I have read contest entries that were ruined due to the writer feeling obligated to get that first kiss into the first chapter, to satisfy contest score sheets that ask for "sparks flying." If you would not kiss this guy at that point in the relationship that is unfolding in the book, don't let your heroine kiss him. If you would not jump into bed with this guy the next day in that relationship, no matter how hot he is, and have gymnastic sex on the first go round, think hard about whether it is realistic for your heroine to show such enthusiasm at that point. I feel the market pressures as much as anyone, but I have learned that if the right place for the first sensual turning point is not until page 90, I have to put it at page 90, not page 35. It is important for us to be true to our story and not try to make it fit some common wisdom about sensual developments.

Does the synopsis trace the romance's development, focusing on the turning points in both the emotional and physical relationship?

(Continued on page 15)

Speaker Speed Date

Ten minutes with one of our conference speakers.

Bronwen Evans talks to Maria V. Snyder about life, the universe, and everything.



It gives me great pleasure to introduce our Friday afternoon Workshop Presenter, Maria V. Snyder, who writes YA fantasy and dystopian fiction. Her first novel *Poison Study*, published in October 2005, won the 2006 Compton Crook Award for Best First Novel, won the Salt Lake Co. Library's Reader's Choice Award, was a 2005 Booksense pick, was nominated for four other awards, and received a Starred Review from Publisher's Weekly.

Bron: We are so excited about having you come to our RWNZ conference in August. For those RWNZ members who don't know much about you, can you tell us a little of your background, where you live, and what you write?

Maria: I live in the USA in Pennsylvania. I grew up in Philadelphia, but now live in a rural area. I'm married with two teenagers, and a black cat named Valek. I graduated from Penn State University with a meteorology degree, and worked

as an environmental meteorologist for a number of years before selling my first book, *Poison Study*. I now write full time and have eight books published, which I still can't believe. I write mainly fantasy and science fiction for adults and young adults. I've gone back to school and have earned a Masters degree in writing from Seton Hill University where I'm now a teacher and mentor for aspiring writers.

Bron: Tell us a bit about your first few books and your latest series. Is it a natural progression or did you want to go in a different direction artistically?

Maria: My Study books (*Poison Study*, *Magic Study* and *Fire Study*) are considered my first series. They focus on Yelena, who is on death row in the beginning of the story. She is offered a choice between the noose and becoming a food/poison taster for a military dictator. Of course, she chooses the new job—otherwise the book would have been one chapter long! The Study and Glass books

(which are a spin-off from *Fire Study* and have many of the same characters from the Study books) are considered accessible fantasy as in they have magic, action and romance, but they don't heavily focus on the fantasy world. My books all focus on the characters, and I think that concentration appeals to my readers who don't normally read fantasy.

My latest books, *Inside Out* and *Outside In* are a departure from fantasy as they are set in the world of *Inside*, which is dystopian society living inside a huge metal cube. There wasn't a conscious progression from fantasy to dystopia. I had been working on *Inside Out* when I received the call about *Poison Study*. I put it on hold while I wrote the Study books and then Harlequin bought *Inside Out* for its new Teen line. I enjoy reading both fantasy and science fiction so it's natural for me to want to write in both genres. And I'll admit it was fun to be in a new world

(Continued on page 16)

(How to Identify...continued from page 14)

As sex comes earlier in romance novels, and as the "will they or won't they?" ceases to be the main story as a result, and as plots become more complex in order to have enough conflict to replace that question (see first point above), it is easy to get off track with the synopsis, and write one where the romance is treated as an afterthought to an action plot or intrigue or mystery.

I critiqued many entries with this problem as a judge before realizing I tended to do the same thing! Failing to keep the romance the central thread in the synopsis may not doom your contest entry, because many judges do not pay a lot of attention to the synopsis, or even to the strength of the story itself. It will doom the chances of selling the manuscript to an editor as a romance, in my opinion.

Is this your story, the way you want to tell it, or have you "written to the contest"?

It is easy to get caught up in contest excitement, and to forget that the goal is to get published, not to collect contest finalist placements or wins. Never compromise your story's originality, voice, or power in order to score higher in contests. Scoring sheets should never dictate how a writer's story unfolds, or cause her to add a GMC dump to the first chapter, just so a judge has to give her a "5" on the goals and motivation question. I see a lot of contest entries where I suspect exactly that has happened, and where perfectly fine partials were ruined by all that contest tweaking.

So, there it is—almost everything I have learned from judging contests. I will end with the line I put on most of the critique letters that I send back with the entries I judge. "This is one person's opinion, and nothing more. Take what is useful to you, and disregard the rest."♥♥

Madeline Hunter © 2010 (used with permission)

Madeline Hunter's first romance was

published in June, 2000. Since then she has seen twenty historical romances and one novella published, and her books have been translated into twelve languages. Over six million of her books are in print. She is a seven-time RITA finalist, and two-time RITA winner. Nineteen of her books have been on the USA Today bestseller list, and she has also had titles on the New York Times printed list, Publishers Weekly list, and the Waldenbooks paperback fiction list. She has received two starred reviews in Publishers Weekly, and Romantic Times has awarded seventeen of her books 4 1/2 stars. Madeline is a Ph.D. in Art History, and she teaches at the college level. She currently lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and two sons.

Her latest book, *Dangerous in Diamonds*, will be released in May 2011. You can find her website at:



www.MadelineHunter.com, and she also hangs out at The Goddess Blogs www.thegoddessblogs.com

(Getting to Know You...continued from page 15)

with new characters.

Bron: Your books are focused on strong teenage heroines. How do you make a YA heroine real to your readers? What emotions do you tap into?

Maria: I try and put myself in the character's head as I write. As a young teen, I wished to be an actress so I had taken classes and performed in various plays. I think those experiences helped me tap into my teenage soul at the time and I've never forgotten it. As for the emotions, I look into my past. My years as a teen were rocky. I wasn't the most popular girl and was often teased and the target of many pranks. So I tap into all those feelings during those trying times.

Bron: Do you write plots, themes and premises from your own experiences as a teenager?

Maria: I don't write plots from my experiences. However, themes and premises could probably be traced back. I like writing about strong females—I was raised to be very independent and to solve my own problems, and I still have that mentality. In the Study books, Yelena has built a wall around herself to keep everyone at a distance to avoid getting emotionally hurt, and that is what I had done in high school. Her realization that she can depend on someone and still be independent matched my own discovery.

Bron: Tell us a little about your Inside /

(Contests...continued from page 12)

and I knew I'd love to have her representing me. She'd already read my work, so we were able to chat about that story, as well as other manuscripts I'd written.

As the winner of the "Meet the Agent" contest, I fulfilled one of my ultimate career goals. One week after the conference, Laura signed me—her first New Zealand author.

Incidentally, my manuscript sold that same week to Harlequin Romance. In 2009, Mills & Boon didn't send an editor over to our conference and instead ran a first chapter contest. My entry finalled in that contest too, and as a result an editor in London requested the full manuscript and purchased it in a two book deal one year later. ♥♥

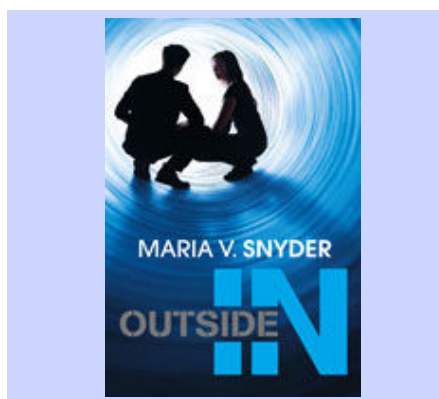
Soraya writes emotional, heart warming romance for Harlequin Romance. Her debut book, *Soldier on Her Doorstep*, is released in the UK in June.

Outside series.. It's an unusual world. How did you begin your world building?

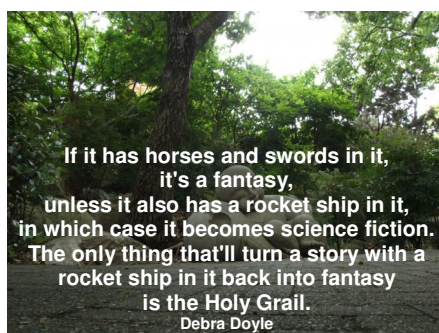
Maria: For *Inside Out*, I had dreamt the story in one night! I dreamt about the characters, the Pop Cops, the world, and even the twists. It has never happened before and hasn't since. I wish I could remember what I had for dinner that night. When I was writing, though, I still had to put in the details of the world without confusing anyone or boring my readers (two major sins!). I usually stick to my rule of three when adding in world-building details. No more than three details at a time so I avoid slowing the pace of the story. Of course, I break my rule from time to time as some things need a bit more description.

Bron: What sort of research did you have to do for your new series which is set in another world?

Maria: For the *Insider* books, I had to make sure the science worked. This world is completely contained and I



needed to have all the vital, life-sustaining equipment in place or else they wouldn't be able to survive. My research included air scrubbing equipment, waste-water treatment plants, hydroponics, and recycling. This society can't throw anything out—they have to reuse and recycle everything, including dead bodies (which are turned into fertilizer for hydroponics via a machine called Chomper). Because of the limited space, I could only have one farm animal so I decided on a flock of sheep, because they provide wool,



meat, and milk and are smaller than cows. I also read a bunch of articles about the various bio-sphere projects.

Bron: Are your themes, worlds and characters plotted out before you start writing? Do you plot out the series before you write book one?

Maria: Nope. I'm a seat-of-the-pants writer, a.k.a. pantsers. When I start a book, I have a beginning with a couple of characters and a situation in mind, and I have an ending that I'm aiming for. How I arrive at that ending is anyone's, including mine, guess. I do have to write a synopsis to receive approval for the novel, but my editor is well aware that I won't follow it. And the same goes for the series. I concentrate on book one and it somehow expands into two more. After writing three books, I'm usually ready for a break and start working on other projects.

Bron: What can our members expect at the Friday afternoon workshop?

Maria: I'm going to be doing two sessions. For the first workshop, I'm going to be talking about magical systems in fantasy, paranormal and urban fantasy. Stories that have magic or supernatural characters all have to adhere to a system. For example, a vampire has certain conventions that readers expect—like drinking blood and avoiding sunlight. However, a writer can break those conventions as long as they have rules put in place. You can't have your vampire out in the daylight in one chapter and then burning up in the sun ten chapters later. Readers won't like that. So this workshop is about using logic for your magic system and how to create a unique system for your story.

The second session is all about fight and action scenes.

They are the most difficult scenes to write well, and to be accurate without being just a list of actions. Movie magic doesn't apply (unless you have a magician that can levitate). I've read dozens of published fight scenes which are physically impossible without the use of trick photography. This workshop will focus on writing these scenes by combining actions, emotions and inner dialogue. Bad action scenes are a pet peeve of mine (can you tell?). I've studied martial arts, self-defense, and learned how to fight with various weapons, so I know what can and can't be done and, I hope, by the end so will the participants.♥♥

(Writing the best...continued from page 5)

emotion. Because this flash of fear on Vivian's face is critical, Lisa Unger wanted the reader to pay attention to this news of a difference.

How did Lisa Unger get the reader's attention?

She did not use a stronger descriptive word. She did not have the POV character react outwardly with a typical line, "What's wrong?" She did not just label the look, fear, and move on.

She empowered that look by:

- Amplifying it, 71 words
- Indicating the flash of emotion on Vivian's face was so brief that she almost missed it
- Labeling it fear
- Letting the reader know Vivian didn't intend to show her fear
- Telling the reader that Vivian is strong (implying rarely fearful), this is news of a difference
- Using cadence
- Backloading—ending a sentence with a power word
- Using the look as a stimulus and showing (not telling) the POV character's reaction
- Including a visceral response

That example, what I call flicker-face emotion, kicks off a turning point. That's why Lisa Unger amplified it.

In my **Four Levels of Powering Up Emotion**, that passage is at the third level, Empowered.

Lisa Unger included a visceral response to strengthen her emotional hook for the reader.

She placed the visceral response at the end of the paragraph to backload with emotive power.

Example:

I notice how still he is. There was so much anxiety and adrenaline living inside me that I couldn't keep myself from fidgeting, shifting my weight from foot to foot, padding a few steps away, then back toward him. But he is fixed and solid. He keeps his hands in his pockets, his eyes locked on some spot off in the distance. All there is to him is his raspy voice and the story he tells.

Analysis: Lisa Unger spotlights the contrast between how the POV character displays her tension—and how the non-POV character keeps his cool.

- Specificity: shifting weight, padding/steps away and back, hands in pockets, eyes/spot in distance, raspy voice
- Emotional Hits: includes *telling* and *showing* = 11 Emotional Hits
- Telling: anxiety, adrenaline, fidgeting, fixed, solid
- Showing: shifting weight, padding/steps away, back, hands in pockets, eyes/spot in distance, raspy voice
- Cadence: Read the passage out loud. You'll notice variability in sentence length, smooth phrasing, and a last sentence that is pleasing to your Cadence Ear.

All there is to him is his raspy voice and the story he tells.

What if Lisa Unger had written the last sentence like this?

All there is to him is his raspy voice and his story.

Aack! Hear it? The cadence is off. Read her line again:

All there is to him is his raspy voice and the story he tells.

Ah. My Cadence Ear is happy.

Deep Editing Analysis:

Dennis Lehane, *Moonlight Mile*.

Dennis Lehane's writing carries a cadence-driven lyrical power and fresh street-smart dialogue that make his gritty crime novels bestsellers—and make his book-based movies blockbusters. The dialogue in these books, *Gone, Baby, Gone*, *Mystic River*, and *Shutter Island*, was so strong, it was used in the movies.

Example: The POV character is angry with Helene, the scuzzy mother of the teenage girl who is missing. Helene doesn't seem worried about her missing daughter.

Here's how Lehane characterized Helene earlier: *"If it smelled of stupid, Helene just had to be somewhere nearby."*

After the silence went on a bit too long, Helene said, "What're you thinking?"

"I'm thinking how I've never had the impulse to hit a woman in my life, but you get me in an Ike Turner frame of mind."

She flicked her cigarette into the parking lot. "Like I haven't heard that before."

"Where. Is. She."

"We. Don't. Know." Helene bulged her

eyes at me like a pissy twelve-year-old, which, in terms of emotional development, wasn't far off the mark.

Analysis:

- Cadence: Read it out loud. You'll hear the cadence drive the reader through every sentence. No meandering. No stalling.
- Allusion: Rhetorical Device—the reference to his Ike Turner frame of mind.
- Clichés: You may know I'm not a fan of clichés.

Like I haven't heard that before.

In this scene, that overused line carried power, strengthened characterization, and made me laugh. I approve using this cliché here.

... wasn't far off the mark.

It works. It's tight. I like the cadence. And I can't think of a better way to end that sentence.

- Period. Infused. Sentences: My way of describing when the author morphs what would have been a normal sentence into sequential single word sentences. Like. This.

"Where. Is. She."

Lehane shared what I call a Dialogue Cue. He didn't add a sentence describing how the words were delivered. He showed it structurally. The punctuation indicates that each word is clipped, and that the character who is speaking is big-time irritated.

He also did something I haven't seen on the page before, but I've heard it in real life. He had one character speak in that clipped style, and had another character respond the same way.

"Where. Is. She."

"We. Don't. Know."

The reader knows the second character is mocking the first. But Lehane doesn't tell us. He shows us. Smart. And smart alecky in a fun way too.

- Facial Expression, Amplified:

Helene bulged her eyes at me like a pissy twelve-year-old, which, in terms of emotional development, wasn't far off the mark.

Lehane could have stopped with: *Helene bulged her eyes at me.*

Lehane could have stopped with: *Helene bulged her eyes at me like a twelve-year-old.*

Lehane could have stopped with:

(Continued on page 18)

(Writing the best...Continued from page 17)
Helene bulged her eyes at me like a pissy twelve-year-old.

Ah! Adding the word 'pissy', adds psychological power. It taps a universal emotion in readers.

Most adults have dealt with a pissy twelve-year-old, a child, niece, nephew, neighbor. Adding 'pissy' elicits an internal nod. It ratchets up the tension and tightens the emotional hook.

But Lehane didn't stop with that strong sentence. He amplified the line and empowered the emotion. Here's his sentence again:

Helene bulged her eyes at me like a pissy twelve-year-old, which, in terms of emotional development, wasn't far off the mark.

Example:

She and Angie hugged then in that unforced way women can pull off that eludes even those men in the world who are at ease with the bro clench. Sometimes, I give Angie shit about it. I call it the Lifetime Hug or the Oprah, but there was no easy sentiment powering this one, just a recognition, I guess, or an affirmation.

"She deserved you." Angie said.

Elaine wept silently into her shoulder and Angie held the back of her head and rocked her the way she so often does with our daughter.

"She deserved you."

Analysis:

- **Empowered Hug:** juxtaposes emotional pain and humor
- **Amplified Hug:** Lehane devoted 62 words to describe that hug. It deepened characterization. These two women had met maybe ten minutes earlier. Amplifying the hug showed Angie's personality. The way Lehane contrasted gender differences regarding comfort level and styles of hugs also hooked readers.
- **Deep Emotion:** Specificity, Comforting adult like child
- **Intentional Echo:** Dialogue repeated for impact.
- **Powerful Cadence:** Read it out loud. The cadence carries power too. ♥♥

(Editors: We'll continue with Part Two of Margie's excellent article next month.)

Margie Lawson —psychotherapist, writer, international presenter—has developed innovative editing systems for writers.

Her Deep Editing tools are used by writers, from newbies to NYT Bestsellers. She teaches writers how to hook the reader viscerally, how to edit with full psychological power, how to write page-turners.

In the last six years, Margie has presented over sixty full day Master Classes in America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Writers who have studied her material credit her innovative editing approaches with taking their writing several levels higher—to publication, awards, and bestseller lists.

Margie has created six in-demand on-line courses she teaches each year. She recently launched a new venture, Lawson Writer's Academy, from her web site.

Lawson Writer's Academy is having an *Open House* in June. Drop by Margie's website on June 9th and 10th, tour her cyber classrooms, and enter drawings and contests. You may win free on-line classes!

To learn about Lawson Writer's Academy, Margie's 3-day Immersion Master Classes, online courses, Lecture Packets, and newsletter, visit: www.MargieLawson.com

You know you're among writers when...

GMC doesn't stand for Good Mates Chatting.
(Or maybe it does?)

Kris Pearson

(Things Your Mother...continued from page 13)
when you find it. That's a real joy when you're scoring. It's a buzz to have the winner announced and know that you picked that one to win!

Plus we offer you a set of guidelines

Here Comes The Judge!

Have you ever thought about volunteering as a judge for one of RWNZ's great contests but been put off because you weren't sure about the judging process? Are you already a judge but would like a bit of a refresher? Well, we have the answer for you. RWNZ's Judge Training Scheme is now underway.

By enrolling in the scheme, not only will you receive some great guidelines on how to score, what to score, what to look for and what not to look for, but you'll also get a chance to study some pre-judged samples to see how it's done. After that, it will be your turn to have a go at judging a sample piece of writing in a non-competitive environment and you'll get feedback to let you know how you went. So, how about it? Ready to give it a go?

If so, then email the Judge Training Coordinator at

rwnzjudgetraining@gmail.com

every time you judge that will sort out most of your questions and offer you hints. And if you're still not sure about anything, our friendly contest managers are standing by to take your call...

Don't we already have heaps of judges?

RWNZ is lucky to have a list of dedicated people willing to judge. However, due to the increase in the contest schedule, the decision to ensure every entry will have at least two first round judges so ensuring at least two critiques, and the sad but inescapable fact that people have other commitments from time to time, all means that RWNZ could do with a bigger base of judges. And let's face it, why should we have all the fun?

I only read sexy/historical/inspirational/whatever romance

We don't want to send people entries that they wouldn't normally be interested in reading. When you register you'll be asked which lines or styles of romance you like. And you'll also be asked if there are any types of romance you particularly don't want to see. This helps our contest manager match you to the entries, so that you

enjoy your judging experience and the entrants benefit from having someone who knows the lines they're judging.

I'm hooked—What do I do now?

Simply drop Kamy Chetty, our Assistant Contests Coordinator, an email kamychetty@yahoo.com

It's that easy!♥♥

"You don't know me, but I'm having your baby."

Thus begins Trish Morey's upcoming novel, *The Heir from Nowhere* (HM&B Sexy—April Downunder) A two times RuBY winner and USA Bestselling author, Trish loves the thrill and chase of nailing that great beginning, almost as much as she loves the alpha heroes her line celebrates. Watch out too for Trish's novella, *The Storm Within* in *A Royal Wedding* this May.

Visit Trish at her website

<http://www.trishmorey.com/>

The essence of drama
is that man cannot walk away
from the consequences
of his own deeds.

Harold Hayes

RWNZ News Around the Regions

Keeping in touch with each other.

AUCKLAND

The May meeting takes place on Saturday 6th of May. The speaker will be Ann Russel and the subject is "*Fragrant Sensuality*". This is a new look at scents and how using them correctly will add depth and tension to our writing and also to our heroes and heroines.

As usual, the meeting will be held in the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion at 12.30. This is situated on the corner of Mt Eden and Mt Albert Roads. Bring a small plate for a shared lunch and try your luck in the monthly raffles.

CENTRAL NORTH C2C

'Romance is hot' if the recent upsurge in our area memberships is anything to go by! Several new members 'braved' their first meeting. Out of 11 at the March meeting, 8 were first-timers. It takes guts to come along and nestle yourself into the romance writer's groove! Well done to you.

Thanks also to Lyn Rasmussen and her support-crew for providing a great meeting! The feedback has been great. Our next meeting is on Saturday 14th of May, at Leanne Shilton's home, Te Mata—Hamilton side of Raglan. 12.00 midday start. Please bring a plate for a shared pot luck lunch. There will be a round-robin email with directions and workshop details sent out closer to the time.

HAWKES BAY

Christine and I met on 14th of April for a social chat over a cup of coffee. We invited two other members in our area but unfortunately they couldn't make it. Both of us are trying to keep up our writing even though we have been busy doing other things lately. I will be returning to Australia at the end of the month and returning for the conference in August. Christine isn't sure yet if she will be going.

If anyone would like to join our group they can email me. Even if we can't physically meet we can still email each other.

WELLINGTON

Wellington/Kapiti branch had an excellent April meeting—smaller than usual, but that meant everyone got more talking time.

It was lovely to congratulate Diana in person for her first placing in the Great Expectations Contest. We made her work, though; some of us had brought along our two-page beginnings, and she read out seven of these for us to comment on.

Next meeting is 1pm, Saturday 7th of May at Meryl's. Writing exercise—please bring no more than 500 words which include the words 'pizza', 'duvet' and 'forlorn'. Historical writers may use 'cottage pie', 'eiderdown' and 'forlorn'.

NELSON

Last week was an exciting week for us as an article about our group had been accepted as feature article in the local monthly magazine *Wild Tomato* and we had some photos taken for it. We all agreed afterwards that being photo models was definitely not as glamorous as it sounds. It was as hard work as any other job. Cherie was chosen to do the cover pic! Very appropriate as the magazine comes out in May and so does her new novel *Kiwi Kiss*. We are all very proud of her.

Our meeting for the month became a 'tea for two' event due to members being overseas or busy with other events. We spent the time talking about some of the articles in the latest H2H, which is always great to use as material for our meetings. For our meeting in May Sally has offered to do a workshop on 'great beginnings'.

OTAGO

We love the growth that meeting each month inspires in our writing. Our heightened desire to make progress and share results means we do knuckle down and write, and this works wonders on our WIPs.

But some of us now struggle with an exhausting side-effect of this regular writing. Having tossed our writer's blocks aside we juggle several projects. Help! How to guide this gushing overflow?

We tackle this issue at our next meeting at Rosalie's, above the breaking surf at St. Clair, at 10.45am, on Saturday 30th of April. Do join us. Contact Viv for directions.



REGIONAL CONVENORS

Auckland: Frances Housden
email: Fhousden@xtra.co.nz

Central North (C2C):
Gaylene Atkins
email: ada.farms@xtra.co.nz

Hawkes Bay: Ginny Suckling
email: ginny.suckling@xtra.co.nz

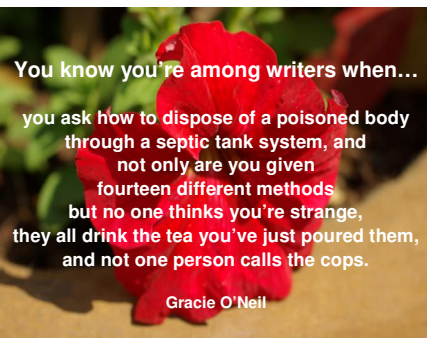
Wellington: Leeanne Morgan
email: morgan.leeann@clear.net.nz

Nelson: Annika Ohlson-Smith
email: allan-annika@xtra.co.nz

Blenheim: Iona Jones
email: iona.jones@xtra.co.nz

Christchurch: Jill Scott
email: scotts@snap.net.nz

Otago: Viv Adams
email: whitecliffodge@xtra.co.nz



If you're a finalist in an RWNZ comp then tell the world!

Suzanne has created finalist logos for you to use on your websites.

This month we're showcasing the Chapter Short Story one.



So if you've finalised in a comp and would like a logo, don't be shy!

Contact Suzanne on:

suzanne.perazzini@orcon.net.nz

Character Development: Being Mean



*NYT best-selling author, **Nalini Singh**, explains why we need to make our characters suffer.*

I'm a meanie and so should you be!

People who know me may disagree with the above. They might say that though I can occasionally blow my top, I'm generally a nice enough human being. They'd be wrong—I'm meaner than mean... to my characters.

When I started writing romance, I couldn't make myself do terrible things to my characters. I just couldn't. I wanted them to be happy. Unfortunately, that meant my books were finished by chapter three, with everyone being happy, happy and living in endless bliss. Nice for them but unfortunately, not very interesting for the average reader.

Despite figuring that out, I still had a hard time really throwing my characters into it and twisting their guts inside out. I mean, I got to the point where I could do it, but it was just so very hard. That was when I attended a RWNZ conference and heard someone very wise say something I'm about to repeat to you. I'd love to acknowledge that person's brilliance but the name has long since disappeared from the Swiss cheese that doubles as my brain. However their words of wisdom have stayed with me—so whoever they were, wherever they are, I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

The speaker said, "Write down a list of five things that your hero/heroine would **hate** to happen to them."

Okay, easy enough. For example, my heroine in *Craving Beauty* would hate to be treated like a chattel, to be valued for her beauty alone. That would be

point one on my list.

Then the speaker delivered the stunning light-bulb-moment-inducing blow. She said, "After you make the list, have those things happen to your character."

Yikes! Now, that's tough. It means you have to forget that these characters are your babies, your friends, your wonderful creations who must not be sullied and you have to start being mean.

I took that speaker's advice and ran with it, figuring out what works for me. I generally do make up a list of 'bad things which would completely destroy character's equilibrium' but whether it has five things on it or ten, depends on the story. Sometimes, I don't have to do all those things to them (yay), I just have to hint that it might happen. So, for example, if a heroine is scared of people leaving her, the hero might be a military man who could one day leave her forever. How's that for instant conflict?

This technique works for both internal and external conflicts, but I use it mostly for internal, because I believe that twisting your character's emotions inside out gives real emotional punch to a story. A romance is all about emotion, and in the end you must deliver on that promise... even if you have to be mean.

Character Clinic: Flaws

How many of you know a perfect person?

I'd say that the percentage is very low. And for those of you that do—does that perfect person make you want to grit

your teeth? Or maybe they just put you to sleep?

Perfect people are boring. It's our flaws that make us interesting. So give your characters flaws, make them real.

Examples:

A small flaw, a tiny thing that rounds out your character and makes them real.

A heroine who is trying to lose weight but who has a secret stash of chocolate that she raids at night.

A big flaw, one that deeply affects how you see that character.

A hero who can't see past his own preconceptions about the heroine because of something that happened in his past.

Those are just a couple of examples off the top of my head. There are thousands more out there so use the ones that work for your character.

Villains & Good Points

If you want to add a contextual layer to your story, give your villain a bit of niceness.

An interesting villain is as fun as a good hero or heroine. And if they have something that doesn't fit, then it takes them beyond one dimension. Maybe they give religiously to charity or help old ladies cross the road? A small quirk can make a big impact.

Of course, sometimes you just want your villain to be deliciously bad, someone we love to hate. In that case, forget about the good points! ♥♥

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