

# Heart to Heart

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ROMANCE WRITERS  
OF NEW ZEALAND

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## Action Figures: Characters Worth Playing

Damon Suede



**Characters are not people. I always feel slightly cruel pointing this out to my fellow authors. Writers, even the most ruthless pragmatists, are a superstitious lot. We tend to be protective of our creations and characterization carries a whiff of**

**magic that most of us have no wish to muddle or meddle with.**

Characters evoke real emotions. They inspire changes in the real world. They can impact and inspire pivotal decisions in our lives. But they are not alive. Even autobiographical characters are fabricated. There is no such thing as a three-dimensional character because stories are sketched in a few telling specifics, not exhaustive microscopic tabulation. Any piece of writing requires elision, illusion, and a willingness to edit for effect. That's just the deal. Even though your heart tells you otherwise, characters aren't alive.

We come by this mistake honestly because it strikes at the root of what makes fiction so powerful. Characters aren't real, but the *emotions* are. The feelings we experience when reading a story can be identical to the feelings we experience living our lives.

When readers recount a story or when authors set out to spin a yarn, character invariably plays a pivotal part because character is how we see the world. We're *social primates*; we navigate circumstances through the most emotionally legible POV available to us. In fiction, that means the imaginary person who gives us things to feel.

**Characters are storytelling tools designed to extract satisfying emotion from your readers.**

Sometimes authors will say their characters "speak" to them or "take control" of the story. That may be poetically true, but it is creatively nonsense. Unless your characters are producing word count while you are otherwise employed, the only person writing your book, controlling that story is you. That said, I've *felt* that myself and I grok

the impulse completely.

This always reminds me of actors who say they "can't shake" a character or a character "lives" inside them even after a show closes. I come to fiction from show business and so a lot of my bag of tricks comes from film, television, and theater. Much of what I know about effective characterization and dramatization comes from almost 30 years working in scripted entertainment.

Actors and authors do vastly different jobs obviously using vastly different tools, but at core they must make an audience believe in an *imaginary* person. Of course, actors act. Smart actors learn to identify their action and pursue it with adamant focus.

When I came to fiction, it seemed odd to me that authors spent so much time obsessing about physical traits and backstory, psychology and archetypes. That kind of trivia can be very helpful in the later stages of a project but it's no way to anchor characterization.

**Character is action.**

We see them struggling toward happiness, having an impact, so we project on to them and form opinions about them and develop relationships with them...just like people in our real lives. Please know when I say action I don't mean Michael-Bay, robots-blowing-up, whoops-there-go-my-knickers folderol. At root, action is always a character's attempt to achieve happiness.

As Aristotle teaches us, "Character is habitual action." Pinpoint the action and characterization happens instantly and instinctively.

A character in a story is an **action figure**...a fun, functional component necessary to a story. Just like literal toys, characters have pieces and pivots, edges and options, a fixed appearance and range of motion that begs to be played with. As it happens, the term "action figure" was developed by Hasbro in 1964 to convince boys to play with a doll they were marketing named G.I. Joe. Sexism be damned. According to Madison Avenue logic and the toy industry, dolls were for everyone but only if you made them sound dynamic. Their purpose was clear: they allowed kids to play inside an existing universe, extending intellectual property into anyone's living room.

Because of that origin story, action figures developed certain characteristics which persist to this day: stylized

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features, joints and articulation, accessories and costuming, durable construction, and a limited range of motion.

The best action figures invite play, make you want to rip through the packaging so you can live in that universe with them. At the same time, they're so enticing collectors often leave them "mint in box" so that they can be admired in pristine condition forever. And some action figures become collectors' items pursued by fans with a devotion that borders on mania.

Readers don't want real people in a book, they want people they can *play* with, folks who are sturdy and striking enough to enjoy in many situations, characters who tickle their fancy and tease their favorite tropes: action figures.

What does that mean for an author?

One of the dilemmas of writing books is that they suffer from the pop-psychology which passes for craft in some quarters. So long as you know your character's coloring, age, gender, size, job characterization is no prob or worse so long as you can wedge your character into some stock formulation or archetypal framework that book will write itself. *Hogwash*. This sounds like writing advice by non-writers that gets repeated out of habit. Knowing what people look like or what their job is barely scratches the surface of identity. If that's true in your life, why not in your fiction?

No. Actions speak louder than words. We look to intention, behavior, outcomes, ethics to determine a person's character...in life and in fiction. Of course, that means that your job as an author is to create *actions* worth figuring. This is why simply saying "he's hawt" or "she's a kickass CEO" fails so spectacularly as a narrative strategy. Instead of telling people what to feel, you must show them fascinating action that elicits feelings.

### **Characters are built of fascinating gaps.**

Characters move us because they are created *inside* us, compelling tools built from the raw materials the author offers. What you leave out can be as important as what you include.

Think about the books you read. What's the common thread between the stories you go back to again and again? What tells you by page 3 that this book isn't worth your time or your eyeballs? We've all read books chock-full of "gorgeous" protagonists, "exotic" settings, "blistering" sex, and "cataclysmic" events that left us bored out of our skulls. Sometimes, when we're uncommonly lucky, we stumble upon books which by all accounts should leave us cold.... but keep us *nailed* to the page into the wee hours. The difference is coherent action that takes us on a satisfying emotional ride. The difference is action figures and the enjoyment smokes off the page.

Best part: it's a win-win in every direction: the more fun you have, the more fun you'll make for your readers. Ac-

tions speak louder than words, and action *figures* know how best to tell their own stories.

With the right cast of action figures, drafting, crafting, revision and pitching become way easier and more enjoyable. Fun for you, and even more fantastic for the fans. Provide action figures audiences want to play with and they'll spread the word and come back for more, eager to play, confident in your artistry, and eager for the kinds of unexpected and satisfying emotions they never knew they needed.

*Damon has earned his crust as a model, a messenger, a promoter, a programmer, a sculptor, a singer, a stripper, a book-keeper, a bartender, a techie, a teacher, a director... but writing has ever been his bread and butter. Though new to romance fiction, Damon has been writing for print, stage, and screen almost three decades and just released his first craft book: Verbalize, a practical guide to characterization and story craft. He's won some awards but counts his blessings more often: his amazing friends, his demented family, his beautiful husband, his loyal fans, and his silly, stern, seductive Muse who keeps whispering in his ear, year after year. Get in touch with him on Twitter, Facebook, or at [DamonSuede.com](http://DamonSuede.com).*



### **Verbalize: Bringing stories to life and life to stories**

Fascinating fiction starts with characters who make readers care. This Live Wire Writer Guide presents a simple, effective technique to sharpen your hook, charge your scenes, and amplify your voice whether you're a beginner or an expert.

Most writing manuals skirt craft questions with gimmicks and quick fixes rather than plugging directly into your story's power source. Energize your fiction and boost your career with:

- a new characterization method that jumpstarts drafting, crafting, revision, and pitching.
- skill-builders to intensify language, stakes, and emotion for your readers.
- battle-tested solutions for common traps, crutches, and habits.
- a dynamic story-planning strategy effective for plotters and pantsers.
- ample examples and exercises to help you upgrade fiction in any genre.

Blast past overused tics and types with story-craft that busts your ruts and awes your audience. Whether you like to wing it or bring it, **Verbalize** offers a fresh set of user-friendly, language-based tools to populate your pages and lay the foundations of unforgettable genre fiction.

# Interview with Lizzie Poteet, Agent with The Seymour Agency

Diana Fraser

**With a background as a romance reviewer and editor at St. Martin's Press (which included launching Swerve, SMP's digital only romance imprint), there's no doubting that literary agent Lizzie Poteet is passionate about romance. So, finish your book, prepare your pitch, and read on to find out how best to catch the attention of Lizzie in her new role as agent with The Seymour Agency, at the RWNZ conference in August.**

Hello Lizzie!

We're looking forward to meeting you in August and have a few questions to help us get to know you a little beforehand.

**Why did you move from publishing into agenting, and what excites you most about your new role?**

I made the leap from editor to agent in 2017, and I have to say what excites me most is being on the other side of advocating for my authors' works. I also love brainstorming ideas and helping fine-tune stories!

**What's hot in romance right now? What are editors looking for, and what would you be most excited to have pitched to you at RWNZ?**

Romance, romance, romance. Right now, I'm seeing more and more editors looking for sure bets, which isn't always the easiest thing for writers to hear since we all can't be established NYT bestsellers. However, that said, each publishing house is different. Some are looking for sexier stories. Some are looking for unique hooks and twists on classic tropes. One thing I've noticed is that the book needs to be more than just X, Y, or Z - meaning saying "it's a small-town romance" isn't the selling point it once was, editors want to know what makes this story stand out. I think personally I'm looking for something sexy and fun.

**I see from your website that your favourite sub-genres include erotic romance as well as inspirational. Would you say there's a trend towards the 'clean and wholesome' (Amazon's definition!) end of the market? Or does sex still sell?**

Sex will always sell. And I love it! However, I can for sure say that sweet has its place as well - especially if you're writing stories that will fit in the inspirational market. One

thing we're really excited about at the Seymour Agency is Hallmark's move into publishing!

**What are your top three pitching tips?**

I would say: breathe, don't apologize for being nervous (I was nervous the first time I heard pitches!), and try to be open to conversation. Oh, and also let me know if the book is finished and what genre it is! I've had pitches filled with misunderstanding because the genre wasn't mentioned.

**New Zealand as a setting in romance novels—an exotic draw card, or too foreign to sell?**

Honestly? I would say it would be a hard sell. Draw inspiration from your surroundings, set your book in a small mountain town or by the coast, but generally American publishing houses prefer American set stories. Back when I was in editorial, I once was told to pass on a book because it was "too international", so there is still some bias in the industry.

**What kind of interaction (i.e. editing, career advice) could a writer expect with you if you take them on as a client?**

I typically focus on editing, idea brainstorming, and branding since that's what my background is in.

**How would you work with a client who has self-published their books? Would their previously published books be part of their contract with you?**

Yes. I have clients that self-publish. I think that sometimes you have to be hybrid to have the career you want. In that case, I have an honest conversation with my author about how involved they want me in their indie career. Do they want me to handle audio and translation rights? All I ask is that my authors have an honest conversation with me before indie publishing.

**How receptive are agents and publishers to new authors? Are there any tips you could give to a 'not-yet-published' author to help them achieve their goal of publication?**

It's hard. I think certain genres do better with debut authors, but often I've found myself counselling authors to consider building base - publishing with digital imprints and houses, indie publishing short stories or in anthologies. The best thing you can do is come up with a fresh, marketable hook. Which is easier said than done, I know.

**What kind of platform do you expect an author to have?**

For me, I expect them to have finished the book if they don't have a platform.

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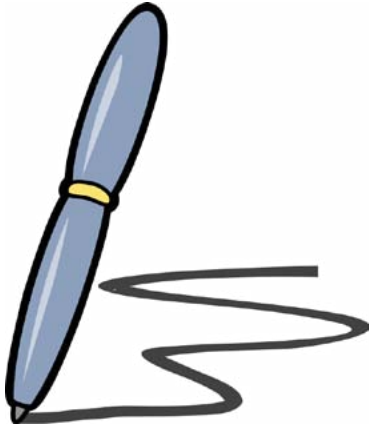
**What's the last book you've read that you're recommending to everyone?**

I'm really loving Cynthia Eden's LOST series, personally, and I was a big fan of THE GREAT QUAKE - a nonfiction book about the 1964 earthquake in Alaska as a nice palate cleanser for any readers who are also interested in geology...

Lizzie, thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. It's greatly appreciated.

*"Rejection slips, or form letters, however tactfully phrased, are lacerations of the soul, if not quite inventions of the devil—but there is no way around them."*

— Isaac Asimov



**Early Bird rates are closing on the 31st of May!**

In August we'll be celebrating our 25th Anniversary Conference – "When Love Comes to Town" – with an amazing line-up of speakers, workshops and events.

As well as Damon Suede – our renowned full-day Friday craft speaker – we have Bella Andre, Grace Burrowes, Nalini Singh and Geoff Symon teaching through the weekend. Plus, for those of you who book the full three days there will also be a bonus two hour "Prose Toolkit" workshop with Grace Burrowes on the Thursday night (so think about that when booking flights and accommodation). We also have a wonderful selection of workshop options to choose from.

**Register here:** <https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/event/rwnz-2018-conference/>



# A Strange Thing Happened On My Way To A Divorce - The Desire For True Mates

Lisa Oliver

**Almost five years ago, romance was a foreign concept for me. My marriage was limping along, wheezing all the while and I was desperate for something to do. Books have always been a passion of mine; a way of escaping real life hassles. My self-esteem low, I turned to MM romance novels (no one likes comparing themselves unfavourably to sexy, sassy heroines when their marriage is on the rocks) and to say my mind was blown wide open was an understatement.**

Having been an ally for the LGBTQ community since the 1980's I didn't have a problem with men loving men. The more I read of these stories, the more I was fascinated by them. The books I was reading were all paranormal – I didn't want to escape to real life scenarios – but what I loved more than anything was the idea that you could scent a person (if you were a shifter) or attune yourself to the beating of a person's life force (vampire of course) and know deep in your very soul that person was the perfect mate for you. When NaNoWriMo 2013 came along I took up the challenge and started to write.

The concept of true mates has a mixed reaction in the romance genre. Some scoff at the idea of insta-love, while others bemoan the fact it would never happen in real life. I like to think my stories ride a fine line between insta-love and something more realistic. My characters might fall in lust with their true mates, but I've always contended that love is a journey and even in my true mate stories, the road is not always an easy one. But they always get their HEA in the end.

On one hand, it is easy to see why true mates appeal to men and women alike. Without the bonuses of heightened senses, or an animal spirit to push us in the right direction, as humans our navigation of the romance path is likely to be filled with more rocks than smooth paths. Yet, many of my readers have shared wonderful stories of their own personal experiences, where they see someone for the very first time and just know that person is the right one for them. Of course, in our society, only time is the proof of that devotion and when I hear of readers sharing with me their marriage of thirty, forty and even fifty years, I smile. True mates at work.

On the other side of the coin, true mates evoke in all of us, feelings from a romantic time; where our significant other is strong, loyal and honest. There is nothing a true mate wouldn't do to make their significant other happy. Wouldn't that be amazing? Then there are the rules. In all the almost fifty stories I have written so far, some

key rules apply to all of them, regardless of the series or world building involved. True mates do not cheat; that is hugely important. True mates can never lie to each other and they are always fiercely protective of their mate. How many of us, I wonder, have cast a sideways glance at our partner of the time and wished that some of those feelings would emanate from the ones we love?

Yes, true mates as such is a trope – one that goes up and down in public favour according to events at the time. As I worked my way through a remarkably amicable divorce, I continued to write, spurred on by the passion I wished I could experience, pouring those passions into my characters and giving them the HEA I craved. Five years later some of my 100 main characters have experienced loss, PTSD, Asperger's, abuse, bullying, and not being accepted by their families for who they are. Those are real life problems and yet I have always believed love is a huge healer and acceptance is a soothing balm on a troubled soul. Before you scoff at the idea of true mates in real life, give it a try in the world of books. If nothing else, it will make you smile.



*Lisa Oliver had been writing non-fiction books for years when visions of half dressed, buff men started invading her dreams. Unable to resist the lure of her stories, Lisa decided to switch to fiction books, and now stories about her men clamour to get out from under her fingertips.*

*When Lisa is not writing, she is usually reading with a cup of tea always at hand.*

*Her grown children and grandchildren sometimes try and pry her away from the computer and have found that the best way to do it, is to promise her chocolate. Lisa will do anything for chocolate.*

*Lisa loves to hear from her readers and other writers. You can friend her on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/lisaoliverauthor>), catch up on what's happening at her blog (<http://www.supernaturalsmut.com>) or email her directly at [yoursintuitively@gmail.com](mailto:yoursintuitively@gmail.com).*

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*Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/wisecrone333>*

*Amazon Author page: <http://www.amazon.com/author/lisaoliver>*

*“First, find out what your hero wants, then just follow him!”*

*– Ray Bradbury*

# When Worlds Collide

## Imogene Nix



**The writing of alternate worlds – be it either paranormal/fantasy or science fiction is all about the creation of a world that is believable for the reader while giving them the romance and excitement they expect from a more tradi-**

**tional romance.**

As a Sci-Fi/Paranormal author, I love having the ability to write in both the genres because I can bend the mores/rules of our society. Whether it be futuristic or alternative worlds I can create a world that bends to my will, has the moral guidelines that suit my story and for the most part this is acceptable. Even more than that though, the chance to create what to me is the perfect society, is so darned exciting!

The rules of writing these romances are not as finite as in the writing of historical or contemporary where it is important to adhere to cultural norms and historical fact. We can shape the experiences of our characters to meet our needs unlike other genres. Don't get me wrong, though, there are some rules, which I've been discussing with other authors lately including the believability aspect. This is not a single unwavering line, because it does depend on the story and is an essential part of the craft of creating stories in these alternate worlds.

When writing a paranormal, which is I find significantly different from writing science fiction, there are decisions that include will this be a parallel universe or take place in the world we presently inhabit? Do we need to draw up guidelines because it's a series (which of course is also the norm for any continuous storyline) and how do we keep the storyline clear? When writing for differing worlds is there a single cohesive point of contact for ongoing stories? Is this going to require insertion into an earth-like world with any forms of historical accuracy? So many questions we must answer and sometimes this information isn't clear until much later.

One thing I see argued regularly though is does there have to be some "science" component? I have heard some say you don't need science in a science fiction—something I shake my head over. The term Science in Science fiction means that without these facts it's fantasy. Something that should be considered in a future article!

If you choose to write science fiction (and this can only improve the standing of the genre!) pick your scientific facts but be prepared to explain them and make that as

*"A poet can survive everything but a misprint."*

— Oscar Wilde

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believable as you can. Readers in this genre do research and pick up on dodgy facts and they do remember when you flout them! (In my experience, that is.) With paranormal, so long as you have some reason for things happening that is—keyword: believable—most readers are willing to cut you a break.

Another really exciting thing that we as paranormal and science fiction authors have the ability to do, is to create languages. If someone would have told me it was going to take me five days to come up with a single swear word (barsha!) I would have laughed at them! When I was writing my first book, *Starline*, that's what happened. Yes, five days, with my husband and two daughters involved on a long road trip! That word is now one of my signature words...

The writing of science fiction isn't all fun and games though because it's still a genre which readers shy away from. The word science seems to scare them. There's this huge well of authors who write books and struggle to find a market, and while things are improving, it's not one of those genres where everything sells. (And yes, while no genre is a definite 'write it and the masses will buy this,' the genre continues to struggle to find its place in the romance world.) Paranormal on the other hand seems to keep reinventing itself and sells quite well. It's certainly not all doom and gloom in outlook though, as in the last couple of years, we've been hearing that there is growth and that it's rising in interest with the publishers. I think that much of this has come about through authors self-publishing in these genre, allowing for more cross-overs.

What do I think is in the future for paranormal and science fiction authors? I believe that paranormal (in all its various strands) will claw back after the intense interest in rural romance/contemporary as the market is cyclical in my experience. Science Fiction will become more acceptable to readers willing to take a chance with strong interest in series such as *Star Trek* etc continue to air in mainstream theatres (though if only there were more Sci-Fi Roms!) It's just a matter of time.

*Imogene is published in a range of romance genres including Paranormal, Science Fiction and Contemporary. She is mainly published in the UK and USA due to the nature of her tales.*

*In 2011, Imogene Nix (the pen name not Imogene herself) was born. Imogene sat down and worked tirelessly for 3 months culminating in the books *Starline*, which became the first in a trilogy titled, "Warriors of the Elector."*

*Imogene has successfully been contracted for twenty-five titles. She has also completed several others. In 2017 Imogene decided to self-publish most of her further works - a plan which is in train and co-authored "Self Publishing: Absolute Beginners Guide" with Suzi Love.*

*Imogene is a member of a range of professional organisations worldwide, and believes in the mantra of mentoring and paying it forward.*

*She loves to drink coffee, wine & eat chocolate and is parenting 2 spoiled dogs and a ferocious cat along with her husband and 2 human daughters. Find out more about Imogene at her website [www.imogenenix.net](http://www.imogenenix.net)*

*Fly with me on [www.twitter.com/ImogeneNix/](https://twitter.com/ImogeneNix/)*

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## Vegemite: Story Kryptonite

Gillian St Kevern



**All stories, even those with contemporary settings, must be convincing in order to sweep readers along with them. Little things, such as how your heroine takes her tea, can be crucial in convincing readers of the truth of your story. The same applies in writing paranormal or fantasy. While readers are willing to allow you a certain amount of leeway with the fantastical elements, you've got to double down on the universal truths and the human condition. If your characters don't behave in a way that's consistent with the rules, beliefs and societal structures you've given them, readers are going to struggle to engage. While that fine line between known and imagined has to be redrawn with every book, I do have one piece of advice that I think is universally relevant: avoid vegemite.**

While I left University a long time ago, I've kept in touch with my Classics professor. When she heard I'd self-published a novel, she wanted to read it. I was really worried that *Deep Magic* would forever tarnish her opinion of me. It's a gay romance with a low-fantasy setting based on Welsh mythology. I spent months waiting for her response, fearing the worse (she turned out to have been really busy). When I finally heard back from her, she said that she was astonished how much she'd enjoyed reading something so different from her usual reading matter—until she got to the vegemite, which had promptly destroyed all suspension of disbelief. "The vegemite," she pronounced, "was a mistake."

Yes, I know—what was I thinking writing vastly inferior vegemite into a story when I could have been writing about marmite? I blame my main character who lived in Australia from the age of sixteen and brought the Vegemite back to Wales with him. Confronted with mythological Welsh sirens and ancient kings, that jar of vegemite became Olly's secret weapon. But while I was confident in vegemite's effect on the mythological creatures in my story, I didn't consider its effect on readers.

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What I did consider was capturing the atmosphere of Wales, a country I've never visited. When I wrote *Deep Magic*, in a town where the local library had maybe ten English books, none of which were about Wales. I spent days on Wikipedia and Google maps, trying to find a location that suited the story I had plan. When I narrowed down my location, I filled a notebook with information about the population make-up of my town, the name of the local newspaper, the animals and birds my characters were likely to see, the weather conditions, the name of the hotel, which housed the local pub. I found groups of Welsh speakers online, and even found a Welsh beta reader.

Vegemite, however, was something I could check. To get vegemite, I had to take the two-hour bus ride to Hiroshima where the nearest foreign food import store was. It was there, on the shelf next to the weirdly shaped British marmite bottles (no NZ marmite—for that, you had to rely on care packages from home). But it wasn't enough just to have vegemite. In challenging the King Beneath the Cliff's, Olly has to eat a tablespoon of vegemite. For the sake of verisimilitude, I did too.

I can't recommend it. I've still got a really clear memory of it, years later. At first, I was surprised how silky it was. I like marmite spread very thinly on a thick piece of toast, so the texture of vegemite was a complete surprise--until it hit my taste buds, and wow. The less said about that the better.

I took notes and a lot of drinks of water. And then I wrote the challenge scene, secure in the knowledge that under-water kings and witches aside, I had authentically captured the experience of eating a tablespoon of vegemite. I was insecure about practically every other aspect of the story, but I was confident I knew vegemite.

Was that confidence the reason the vegemite struck a jarring note in my story? It's possible. It's also possible that thematically, Vegemite didn't fit—the heart of *Deep Magic* is the intersection between stories, truth, magic and belief. I foreshadowed the vegemite early in the story, so while this might be author-bias, I'm confident it wasn't shoehorned in. My guess is it's got more to do with the nature of vegemite itself. It's really hard to find someone who is on the fence about marmite. You're either a marmite person, or you're not. Vegemite is similar. I know one person who flat out refused to read *Deep Magic* because of the vegemite factor.

So, my advice for successful suspension of disbelief in your paranormal, fantasy or sci-fi novel: avoid things with vegemite levels of audience polarization.

## From The Editor



"A whole new world is about to open up for you. Stop being proud, let people do this for you because folks love you!" No these are not the words from a novel, but from friends who encouraged, coerced, slapped me sideways and donated towards the airfares for my next adventure.

I have never travelled overseas. Unlike many of my fellow kiwi's I have travelled the length and breadth of Aotearoa, but never have I ventured over the ditch. Recently I was offered the opportunity to travel to the states to go to New York, Pennsylvania and Washington DC to assist with a series of women's spirituality workshops.

Basically, these workshops are for women whose sense of the sacred has been damaged by institutions and individuals. On these workshops filled with renegade women; desperate to reclaim a sense of the sacred that is theirs by choice and understanding, I will be teaching on the feminine divine as well as taking spiritual direction sessions.

You'd think I would jump at the opportunity, right? After all the only thing I needed to do was get my airfares and spending money. But I froze. As the sole income earner in our house and working in job of sole responsibility, I was so used to doing for others that I could not even comprehend allowing myself the luxury of a few weeks expanding my world. My friends know me well and after many a facebook conversation around the general theme of "Get over yourself woman," I am about to head off for several weeks to experience the wonder of being the small-town girl in the big city.

I want to thank all those in my writing group who have been so wonderful in supporting me as I embark on this next adventure. Especially I wish to thank Gillian St Kev-ern/aka Louise who is taking over the Editorship of Heart to Heart as I expand my mind.

I have received several pieces of vital information as I head off on my travels including:

- Don't sleep with prostitutes
- Don't take drugs
- Don't get a tattoo
- Don't make jokes at customs and
- Don't kiss a soldier in Times Square – which of course I will not! I will kiss two soldiers and purely for research purposes.

Of course I will be looking out for any romance writers I can interview on my travels – let me know if you there is anyone in these areas I can catch up with.

*Megan*



# Romance In The Paranormal World

Pamela Gervai



**Some romance readers will tell you they have no interest in paranormal, fantasy, or science fiction. As a writer in these genres - and as an admirer of romance writers, I suggest you do try reading one. I hold Nalini Singh's works in the paranormal genre as a prime example. There is so much romance it positively leaks through the covers. (Just look at the cover of any of her books!)**

Speaking for myself, there is nothing more satisfying than creating a believable world in the fantasy genre with characters who could feature in any romance novel with their flaws, desires, or behaviour. No matter whether they be a vampiric sort or some being with super powers - all long for the same thing in my books; the HEA. Even the villain thinks he deserves love.

Lately I've been reading Phillip K. Dick's work. Some of you may know of him as a science fiction writer. Let me tell you, romance threads through the majority of his stories. What about crime thrillers? They're also a favourite read for me - but none are so gripping as the ones that have a strong romance element. Larger than life characters with strong desires, flaws, loss that needs healing - all feature in these writers' works, and their need to be understood and loved transcends everything else in making these a gripping read.

Okay, so how to go about writing a romantic paranormal? The first thing you need to consider is the world your characters will inhabit. This is much the same process as for a historical romance writer. You can make the world fantastical but like the worlds of history or of contemporary times, the thing must hang together. You can't have gravity acting on your protagonist at one step, and him flying away the next. To make it believable, make sure you have rules that bind the world; beliefs the characters live by; and lives that are beholden to threat of things like failure or death, just like the reader. Continuity is vastly important and cannot be ignored. No reader will want to continue the ride if bolts of power out of nowhere allow your characters to escape, or being surrounded by enemies, some sudden cloak of invisibility allows them to tiptoe off the scene.

Yes, I know I'm exaggerating a little, but I have actually encountered these escape devices in some works, which have made me close the book and read no more.

It doesn't matter if the world is fictional or peculiar. What is essential is that it is believable. I cannot emphasise the point too much. Be true to your character in the world they inhabit. Have you seen the Guardians of the Galaxy films? The worlds are all over the place, but the characters remain true to who they are. They do develop as every character should but their reaction to each strange world they have to survive in, is as true to the character as it was when we first meet them. And yes, romance features in each film - although a dedicated romance reader might not recognise this straight away.

After sorting out your world and its rules, your next work is to sort your characters. They might have any number of powers or peculiarities, but these cannot suddenly change to help them out of some difficulty. Just as in any good romance, the characters stay true to who they are - and they will have flaws to overcome, conflicts to manage, both internal and external, just as we all do. Think of Superman and the regular conflicts of secrecy and Kryptonite he has to face and overcome. He has rules to obey in his world, just like the rest of us, and that is what makes him not only credible, but fallible. He and Batman facing their larger than life difficulties have us on their side, as much as for their character flaws as for their heroic attempts to succeed against all odds - and romance is as strong an element as the world they inhabit.

Finally, and most importantly, get your plot right. No, you don't have to be a plotter. Be a pantser but do have some idea of your ending. Your main characters deserve a HEA as is paramount for all romances. Thinking of your characters how is this going to be achieved? The fun part of the paranormal genre is that some pretty fantastical and horrific stuff can get in the way - BUT this is what makes your happy ending so much the more enjoyable for the reader. Extremes have been overcome. The battle has been won and the hero and heroine have reached a well-deserved conclusion.

*Pamela Gervai came to the realisation of the importance of romance in writing, when she joined RWNZ. She has been inspired by every Conference. Being in the milieu of romance writers she says, has enriched her work to an incredible degree. She writes under her own name and has several books published on Amazon and a novella series.*

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*"If you write one story, it may be bad; if you write a hundred, you have the odds in your favor."*

*— Edgar Rice Burroughs*

## From The President

We are coming to that time when our RWNZ Secretary, Kate O'Keeffe will soon put a call out for remits and for nominations for the 2019 Executive Committee of RWNZ.

In August, at the AGM, I will have completed two years as President of RWNZ and I will be stepping down. I'll still be on the executive as past-president to help the new team. I must thank the current team for working together so well and for staying focused.

Executive committee members came and went over this period but that is to be expected. Many people start off with great intentions, and then things happen, and life gets in the way. We all understand that. There is no shame in putting your hand up and saying, 'sorry guys, something has come up' and then stepping down.

We are all very busy people, with family, work, and writing commitments. It doesn't leave much spare time. So, whoever decides to stand for the Executive, please remember that our members are not expecting you to be legends. They want an organization that listens to them, and an Executive who works to ensure the organization is running smoothly.

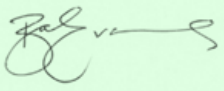
As an Executive committee member, I stress that you should only work on a couple of important things over the year, so that you don't overstretch your time and then get completely stressed. Be realistic about what you can achieve and talk to the members and keep them informed. They will understand, and many will offer to help. We have members with various skill sets and it's a great pool of people for the executive to turn to for help.

I guess what I'm leading up to is don't be scared to stand for the executive committee in any of the roles. It is work, but it is also really rewarding knowing you are doing something for your organization. An organization that has helped so many of us. If there is something you'd like to deliver, or work on for the organization, then stand. You won't regret it.

The roles and position descriptions are on the website.

<https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/membership/agm-remit-proxy-form/>

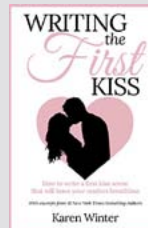
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Bronwen Evans



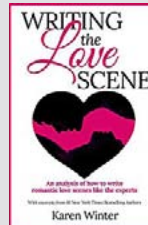
## Woos & Hoos



Congratulations Karen White w/a Karen Winter who has published two books on Amazon recently: **Writing the First Kiss** and **Writing the Love Scene**.

Buy Links:

<https://amzn.to/2vhX0rF>  
<https://amzn.to/2H6GDzS>



JC Harroway is celebrating the release of **One Night Only**, her romantic vs the cynic novel for Harlequin Dare. With a bi-line of "Chemistry is all they have in common!", you know it's going to be good. <https://amzn.to/2l2mT1u>



Emma Bryson celebrated the release of her debut novella recently with **Turned On: Take Me Private**. This erotic novella is published by Carina Press. <https://amzn.to/2r2M8lW>

The final book in Annie Seaton's Best-selling Prickle Creek series releases 15 May, **His Outback Temptation**. All the buy links are here... as well as the gorgeous covers! <http://www.annieseaton.net/prickle-creek-farm.html>



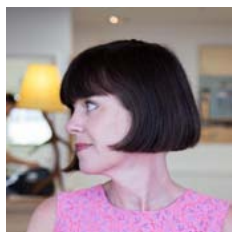
Jean Drew w/a Gina Blake is delighted to announce the release of Book 3 in her Good Girls Do Trilogy. Check out: **Lessons in Love**, **A Long and Lusty Road** and her latest book released May 9th **Tender Lusting Care**.

Buy Links:

<https://amzn.to/2JxmIKT>  
<https://amzn.to/2HZ0yEe>  
<https://amzn.to/2l5q08Y>

# Taking Your Turn At The Front

## Catherine Robertson RWNZ Vice President



**My husband has been a competitive cyclist since he was 12 (yes, that's a while ago!). When cyclists ride in a bunch, everyone's expected to take a turn at the front. When you're riding behind, you're pulled along in the slipstream, so it's much less effort. That's why your fel-**

**low riders expect you to share the effort – and if you watch some races, they're not shy about insisting others get their butts up there! Geese do the same thing when flying in formation – the lead drops back and lets another take the spot at the front of the V.**

I think you can guess where I'm heading with this – almost all the current Executive will be standing down this August, and it's time for other members to volunteer to step up. RWNZ can't survive if we don't have people willing to take on these important volunteer roles – and it can't survive if we have only the same people taking them on year after year. You don't have to be a long-term member, or a published author. You do need time for the role and a few key skills, but you'll have a thorough handover and ongoing help from the previous Executive. And, yes, you can resign during the year if life gets in the way.

### ***What volunteer Executive roles need to be filled?***

**President:** this is not a status role at all, but it is a commitment. Your number one job is to protect the best interests of all RWNZ members. You need to ensure that every decision the Executive makes about spending members' money or offering new services has to benefit the majority of us, not just a few. Skills-wise, you'll need to be able to chair meetings, get your Executive team working well together, understand finances, and have an overview of all the RWNZ activity, from our website to Conference. Our RWNZ rules say the whole Executive must consult and vote on every decision, but the President can have the casting vote if the Executive is tied.

**Vice President:** you're the President's backup, and the point of contact for the Chapters and local groups. The Executive can also ask the VP to take on other roles as need be, and the current VP (i.e. me) oversees grants and sponsorship.

**Membership Secretary:** the new website means membership sign-ups and renewals have never been easier. You will be the first point of contact for any existing or

potential members with enquiries, and you'll need to have an overview of our contact with members and welcome all new members.

**Secretary:** you are responsible for the agenda and minutes for each Executive, and for getting all the papers ready for the AGM at Conference, e.g. Executive nomination forms and remits.

**Publicity Officer:** you're responsible for telling everyone how brilliant RWNZ and all our members are through our own communication channels, e.g. our website, RWNZ Facebook and Twitter, member-only Facebook, Heart to Heart and emails, and through external channels, like the media. Your big job during the year is to publicise Conference, and you will have help with this from the Conference publicity sub-committee.

**Treasurer:** the wonderful and efficient Tania Roberts, who is a qualified Chartered Accountant, will stay on as Treasurer. You can still nominate yourself for this role if you like, and the members will vote. You will need to know Xero and book-keeping practices, and if you are not a Chartered Accountant, we will need to work with an external one, to be sure our books and tax obligations are all in order.

### ***Other non-Executive but vital roles:***

**Editor of Heart to Heart:** we've been blessed with amazing past editors and layout designers who have made this magazine a true asset to RWNZ. It is a commitment and you are welcome to share it with another member or a group of members.

**Contest Co-ordinator:** the amazing Jude Knight is standing down, so this role is free. You will have the overview of all the contests and work with the individual contest managers to ensure everything runs smoothly and contests are adequately promoted.

**Contest Managers:** you will be in charge of the entries, supervision of judging, communication with entrants, and promotion of a contest. We have five contests: the Daphne Claire de Jong First Kiss, Great Beginnings, Chapter Short Story, the Pacific Hearts and the Koru.

**Conference Committee:** if we don't have a Committee, we don't have a Conference – simple as that! Planning needs to start well over a year in advance, and while the Committee must have their programme and budget approved by the Executive, you get a lot of autonomy in choosing venue and speakers.

### ***How long do you have to think about it?***

The notice for this year's AGM and a call for nominations, remits and special resolutions will go out to all members in mid-late June, and you'll have four weeks to complete your nomination and email it back to the Secretary. There are full role descriptions available, and any of us on the current Executive are happy to answer any questions – just email us.



# A Quick Guide To Romantic Science Fiction

Mary Brock Jones



**Romantic science fiction – science fiction, yes, but with a romantic element. This is the genre of my Hathe series, set on a planet conquered by Earth.**

*“When two, opposed worlds fight for survival, what chance*

*have a pair of duty-plagued lovers caught in the middle?”*

So just what is romantic science fiction? Many assume the term means a romance in a science fiction. Not quite. It's where there is a romantic element – often with an HEA – but the science fiction plot is more important. Unlike in Science Fiction Romance, also a growing and exciting new subgenre.

The best way to understand romantic science fiction is to read or watch it. I found this great [link](http://www.explore-science-fiction-movies.com/romantic-science-fiction-movies.html#axzz3ZczD6QQR) (<http://www.explore-science-fiction-movies.com/romantic-science-fiction-movies.html#axzz3ZczD6QQR>) to a list of favourite Romantic SF movies. What a list, and all so different. From the blatantly obvious “Cherry 2000” to subtle tensions of “Gattaca”.

My favourite? For me, it's “Starman” every time. Jeff Bridges and Karen Allen in the 1980s classic tale of an alien crash landing on Earth, with an ending that gives me chills of satisfaction and wonder every time.

Interested in taking the plunge? Well some of my favourite romantic science fiction series are:

[Catherine Asaro's](#) Skolian series: Asaro is a genuine physicist, with a PhD in quantum mechanics, but her Skolian series has caught my heart and twisted it in knots so many times. The best one in the series for me is [Diamond Star](#) – a sci-fi rock star romance, would you believe – but it's best to start at [Primary Inversion](#), Book 1 in the series.

[Lois McMaster Bujold's Vorkosigan](#) series – with the funniest, sharpest and least likely hero of any science fiction series.

[Anne MacCaffrey's Pern](#) series – an oldie, but still a goodie. The early books are the best. Set on a planet that has reverted to a medieval type world, complete with dragons, they feel like fantasy but do have a credible science fiction basis. Less well known but just as good is her [Crystal Singer](#) trilogy, where music becomes both weapon and tool.

As for Science Fiction Romance, there are a growing number of authors creating exciting stories in this genre. True romances but set in a sci-fi world and using sci-fi tropes and themes. Some of my favourite authors are:

[Anna Hackett](#) – an Australian engineer who is a self-publishing phenomenon. My favourite is her Hell Squad Series, starting with [Marcus](#) – and this series is set in Australia, so very close to home. Aliens have invaded Earth and are hellbent on wiping out humans. The Hell Squad is equally hellbent on stopping them.

[Linnea Sinclair](#) – winner of numerous sci-fi romance awards. Browse her titles and dive right in. They're all good, and the series books standalone well. Though as with any series, it's better to start at the beginning to fully appreciate the stories.

[Susan Grant](#) – a RITA award winner for her human/alien romance [Contact](#). She is also a commercial airline pilot, which brings a fine touch of realism to her depictions of flying space ships. Also try her [Star Series](#) – beginning with Star King.

There are a number of useful sites for exploring romance science fiction – for authors or readers. Good Facebook pages are:

[Darkside Downunder](#) – for Australian and New Zealand speculative fiction romance authors.

[The Science Fiction Romance Brigade Fanpage](#) – for readers

[The Science Fiction Romance Brigade](#) - closed group for SFRomance authors

I hope you take the time to explore these wonderful blends of science fiction and our beloved romance. SFRomance is a healthy and growing subgenre, offering new ways for authors to explore different conflicts and ideas. As for romantic SF – it's been around forever. Just no one noticed!

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*“Get it down. Take chances. It may be bad, but it's the only way you can do anything really good.”*

– William Faulkner

## Conference Volunteers Needed!

Our 2018 conference is racing toward us at the speed of light, so it's time to start sharing some of the volunteer jobs around to make sure everything runs like clockwork. The registration desk at conference is always open for several sessions. This is where you claim your goodie bag, lanyard, etc. As I need to draw up a list of volunteers, let's start with people willing to take on the important task of setting up the table and issuing the bags. Email me (Kris Pearson) at [kris.p@kinect.co.nz](mailto:kris.p@kinect.co.nz) to claim your place.

Anyone keen to help with goodie-bag stuffing on Thursday afternoon? A very important job, but a fast one. Who'd like to help with raffle prize wrapping and ticket selling? If you're bringing a raffle prize from your local group, or as a personal donation, it would be appreciated if you brought it wrapped – or at least brought paper and ribbon so you can assemble it on arrival.

The Cocktail Party organiser and Awards Dinner organiser will be building their own teams for these glittering events, but in each case I need a couple of volunteers to be greeters/ticket-takers at the door while people arrive. It's a fun job if you're a new member because you get to say a brief hello to everyone but don't have to strike up long conversations! If you and a friend would like to be our greeters at either of these, please let me know. (You do need to be attending the event.)

Would you be interested to help decorate the rooms? I'll pass your names on to the appropriate organisers. Who's an electronics whizz? We'll need someone for AV set-up and support.

Prize runners – these are the people who dash around handing out spot prizes and raffle prizes to save the lucky winners struggling up to claim them. Nice job – you'll need to be fast.

Here's something we can't finalise until you've booked which workshops you're attending: the introducers and thankers for all the breakout workshop speakers. If you've already booked your workshops and would like to introduce and thank someone in particular, please let me know. Usually I get a list of all attendees closer to the date and email you with a request when I can see who will be where, but if you want a special person, I'm waiting at [kris.p@kinect.co.nz](mailto:kris.p@kinect.co.nz)

'Cold Reads' readers. These are the sessions where the first two pages of members' books are read out in the presence of our visiting editors and agents for comments. It's always interesting to hear those comments, and it's great to hear what others are writing. We need several people with good clear voices to read out these pages. Please let me know if this sounds like you. And that's it for now – but there might be more later.

## World Building For Speculative Fiction

Mary Brock Jones



**World building is an integral part of any speculative fiction writing, whether it be science fiction, paranormal, fantasy, horror, urban fantasy or any other subgenre set in a world not quite as we know it.**

The kinds of worlds created vary hugely, but all share certain features. To be successful, worlds must have rules, both overt and unwritten. Those rules must be applied consistently and be credible. Lucky Coincidence has no part in world building.

Aspects of world building to consider include: Physical, Cultural and Social attributes.

### Physical:

The physical aspects of the world – what can be seen, felt, touched, smelt and heard.

**Spatial/Physical.** Where is the story set: e.g. on a planet, in space or in an artificial habitat? If on a planet, consider:

- What kind of terrain the story takes place in (dry, rocky, swampy etc.
- What does the sky look like, (colour, clouds, light intensity, how many moons/suns?)
- Is there an atmosphere, and is it breathable by all or some of the characters?
- Is there gravity, what strength and how does it affect the characters?
- What is the day and night length? Are your characters nocturnal, diurnal or in between?
- Other timescale features: year, month etc. Does the world use a universal standard timescale, shared with other worlds, or one specific to that world – and if so, what is it based on.

**Plants & animals.** The basic requirements of all living organisms, including your main characters, are to breathe, breed and eat. How does that happen in this world? For sentient species, what are the rules around these basic needs.

**Space and space ships.** The nature of space is now well enough known that it varies little between authors. What does change is how the characters inhabit it.

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How do they travel through space? There needs to be some kind of plausible physics behind any interstellar transport, whether based on currently known knowledge, or credible invented or extrapolated science, whatever the method of crossing the enormous distances. What is the physics behind it? This generally only needs to be set out in detail if it directly affects the story line, but the author should have some idea of the basis for interstellar travel, if needed.

What do the spaceships look like? The Enterprise in “Star Trek” has decorations only in the private cabins of the crew. Otherwise it is utilitarian and shipshape, a futuristic naval vessel. However, the colours are light and restful. This is a military vessel, but not an overtly aggressive one. Also, although the Enterprise is home for the crew, they do have real homes planet-side.

In contrast, the ship in “Firefly” is a working ship of galaxy fringe dwelling traders. In general, the working areas of the ship are dark coloured, and industrial in appearance. However, there are also stencils and warm colours in the general dining area and the private cabins are individually stylised and filled with personal possessions. This ship is the only home of the crew.

#### **Environmental:**

What is the **weather** like? Dry or temperate. How variable are the planetary weather patterns – stable, widely varying in different regions, or highly unstable and prone to storms, drought and other natural disasters?

**Planetary ecosystems.** What kind of flora and fauna fill this world? Are they native, introduced from earth type, or a mixture of both. If a mix, what effect does the introduced flora and fauna have on the local, and vice versa. New Zealanders are lucky in that we have a hundred years of such ecological conflicts to call on for ideas. If a fully artificial environment, how balanced is the resulting ecosystem. Are all niches filled, or are some lacking, creating a dangerous imbalance?

**Level of agriculture or industry.** Primitive or highly advanced. Primarily rural or urban. If there is farming, what species are farmed (crops or animals), and who by? If cities, how big, what kind of homes, what are the methods of transport (e.g. horse or flying)?

**Level of technology e.g. lasers or swords.** What energy sources are used, is energy limited, how do they communicate, produce food, build homes and manufacture goods? This is important for all genre, whether sci-fi, fantasy or any other speculative subgenre. Characters can only use what is available to them.

**Magic vs science.** This is particularly important for fantasy, paranormal and urban fantasy. Magic is not an easy out. It must have rules and limitations, and can both help or endanger the main characters.

#### **Cultural:**

**Language.** How do the characters in your story communicate? There may be only one or multiple languages. What are the physical methods of communicating by non-human species. Possibilities include vocalising, sounds, smells, touch, e.g. as in deaf sign language, or some other means, e.g. the body colour changes of some squid species.

**Music.** Is this important? How is it made? “[Songmaster](#)”, an early book by Orson Scott Card, tells of an extraordinarily gifted singer in a society where such gifts are highly valued and controlled by an elite organisation. The boy’s greatest gift is turned against him to become the source of his greatest suffering.

**Religion.** This is such an integral part of the history of human societies that you should decide whether there is a religion, and whether it enters the story. Examples of important religions in science fiction include the cult of Muad’dib in Frank Herbert’s Dune books and the missionary priests in Mary Doria Russell’s “[The Sparrow](#)”. In Fantasy, cults and religions are frequently featured.

**Militarism.** If there is fighting, there has to be soldiers, trained or not. What is the role of the military in this world and are they villains or heroes. What drives them to fight? How does any warfare or military group affect the rest of the society? Are they looked up to, regarded as protectors, or feared as a threat, or outsiders? If the latter, why?

For example, are they like the crew in Firefly, or Robin Hood and his band—basically good people who lost a war against a rampant empire—or are they mere bandits and criminals, greedy for power and wealth.

Or alternatively, honourable and bound by duty, committed to give everything to the cause they fight for – good or bad. The latter makes for wonderful conflict, especially when a basically good character discovers the cause they are pledged to is a hollow sham, for example, and they are being used by those they cannot trust or respect.

**Magic.** I’m including here the science fiction phenomena of telepathy and other paranormal abilities, which play the same role in stories as magic does in fantasy.

What can characters do with these abilities? Do they use them wisely or does the magic rule them by the lure of power, greed, or easily acquired wealth—as in Loki in Thor?

What are the rules governing the use of magic? Who can use it, and how does it affect their position in the world. Are they liked, respected or feared? Is magic allowed or banned (see the TV series “Merlin”, where magic is banned in Arthur’s father’s kingdom.)

**Cultural differences.** Any misunderstandings between

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between cultural groups is a valuable source of conflict. Examples include *The Sparrow*, by Mary Doria Russell, where missionary priests are the first to visit a newly discovered alien world and the conflicts between the three human empires in [Catherine Asaro's Skolian](#) series: Skolian, Earth and Traders.

### **Social:**

How are societies organised in your world, both from the smallest, most intimate units to the wider political entities?

1) **The Family unit** – including both scientific and cultural reproductive systems. How are young raised, are they valued or a burden? Who raises the young? How stable are family units? What is the basis of joining a family unit – romantic love, physical attraction, unions between political or other social groups, genetic breeding for some advantageous attribute? Does the nature of family vary between different groups in your story, and is this understood by both/all groups? In “[Enders Game](#)” the insectoid aliens are dependent on a central Queen, who is in constant communication with all of her hive members.

2) **What is the local unit – town, ship, city, neighbourhood?** Characters do not act in isolation and their local social units are often the most important in their daily lives. Are they in a place they have lived for a long time i.e. a permanent home, or are they travellers, homeless and outsiders wherever they stay?

3) **What is the overall political system** – is this an Empire, a democracy, a warrior society, orderly or anarchical, politically stable or in a time of change and stress? What is causing that?

4) **What is the inherent hierarchy of the world** – how are individuals valued, and is there any kind of class system? What is it based on – wealth, birth, education, magical abilities or some other attribute, or physical prowess e.g. warriors? How is power and governance decided: a vote, war, the possession of paranormal abilities or some other special attribute?

5) **What is the financial system.** Characters need to eat, and there needs to be a system of allocating resources, which is basically the function of any financial system. So how do your characters acquire what they need? Are they employed or self-employed? How self-sufficient can they be in this world, or do they need to buy or barter for goods or food? Do they use money, internet-type transactions, or barter with goods and services?

I hope these questions help in creating your own worlds. The author needs to know the world of their story inside out and understand when or why the nature of the character's world influences or creates the conflict of the story.

However – always remember the iceberg. Just because

you know exactly what is under the water, doesn't mean you have to bore your readers with detailing every facet. All that stuff underneath is there to support what is seen above water, not to drown it. All the readers want to know are those details that directly affect the storyline.

Keep these background details in mind for future use. They can make a great newsletter goodie or blog post for your readers!



Mary Brock Jones writes both science fiction (self-published) and NZ historical romance (Escape Publishing). Her books have made the finals list for the Romance Writers of Australia RUBY awards, the RWNZ KORU awards, and the RWNZ Clendon awards. The third book in her romantic SF Hathe series is due out soon. Blog: <http://www.marybrockjones.com/blog/>

*“The more closely the author thinks of why he wrote, the more he comes to regard his imagination as a kind of self-generating cement which glued his facts together, and his emotions as a kind of dark and obscure designer of those facts. Reluctantly, he comes to the conclusion that to account for his book is to account for his life.”*

– Richard Wright



# Regional Round-Up Reports

**Auckland**  
Convener: Ruth Bell  
([ruth.s.clough@gmail.com](mailto:ruth.s.clough@gmail.com))

We had three wonderful speakers this month: Frances Housden, Karina Bliss and Jackie Ashenden. The three of them formed a panel and gave a presentation called Writing the Damn Book, where they each talked a little bit about their respective writing processes.

Frances is a complete pantsier, who feels her way through her novels and makes connections and weaves her stories into actual historical events as she goes. Jackie is a pantsier who uses some plotting elements to assist her writing process. She relies on her characters to guide the story and tell her where things need to go. Karina thought she was a pantsier, but discovered she is more of a plotter, who thinks about the threads of her story - character arc and romantic arc - and the beats of each one to help her and her characters navigate through the story to a happy ending. It was fascinating to listen to each author describe their process and give tips and advice along the way.

Next meeting is Saturday 2 June at the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion from 12:30 to 3:00 p.m.

**Hawkes Bay**  
Convener: Kendra Delugar  
([kendraonthemove@hotmail.com](mailto:kendraonthemove@hotmail.com))

Our April meeting was held at Clare's, where we all caught up with on what we'd been doing. Jackie has been entering a lot of US competitions and it was fascinating to hear about the range of feedback and to celebrate her efforts. Then we got onto our homework, which was to look at how we each of us tackled describing setting in our books. We found if we took to a couple of pages of work with a highlighter, just highlighting where setting was described, that it was very illuminating. It was a great exercise, and a great way to look at the balance within a piece of work.

We meet on the first Saturday of the month at 1pm, and new members are always welcome. Our next meeting will be held on the 5th of May at Mariana's and we'll be working on characterisation.

**Coast to Coast Convener: Vivienne Matthews** ([vivienmatthewswriter@gmail.com](mailto:vivienmatthewswriter@gmail.com))

**Nelson**  
Convener: LaVerne Clark  
([nelsonromancewriters@xtra.co.nz](mailto:nelsonromancewriters@xtra.co.nz))

Our April meeting was an intimate gathering of four. Annika led the group through a session on how to write a good critique. Lots of discussion was had before two very brave souls surrendered their pieces up for practise. It was very interesting to see how often we had similar things to say, and in the end, it was very enlightening and empowering for the writers.

Once again, we were fortified by the excellent baking provided by Annika – this time it was a beautiful orange cake made with 50 percent plain and 50 percent almond flour. Yum! I see a baking cookbook coming out in the Nelson Chapter's future!

Next month's meeting date has changed and will be a week earlier on 5th May. Otherwise, they are held every second Saturday of the month at 2pm, venue: Nick Smith's Head Office on Quarantine Road. All welcome!

**Otago**  
Convener: Maria King  
([franciscowie@gmail.com](mailto:franciscowie@gmail.com))

Otago chapter didn't meet last month but look forward to getting together in the weeks to come.

**Wellington/Kapiti Coast Convener: Moira Kay**  
([Moirajeen@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:Moirajeen@yahoo.co.nz))

This week Ellie welcomed 15 of us into her new home, including fresh faces Sam and Fred. Jane ran a group activity using a collection of words with which to build a blurb, and the results were so intriguing we're more than ready to read these non-existent stories! Anne gave us the first installment of an Instagram tutorial, including basic set up and potential for authors. Next time-how to create and post graphics using Canva. We ended with more than a dozen first page cold reads for feedback and it was wonderful to enjoy so many different writing styles. Last, we were to have a photo session, but we camera-shy beauties settled on a brief discussion about selfie angles and ran for the door before a single pic was snapped!

**Blenheim Convener: Iona Jones** ([ionajones@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ionajones@xtra.co.nz))

**Christchurch Convener: Lyssa Randolph** ([lyssarandolph@hotmail.com](mailto:lyssarandolph@hotmail.com))