



Hearts Talk

Queensland

Mel Teshco chats to

Charlaine Harris

A novelist for over twenty-five years, Charlaine Harris is now best known for her Sookie Stackhouse/True Blood series. Before Sookie, she was busy writing other series books, including Aurora Teagarden, Lily Bard 'Shakespeare' and Harper Connelly, as well as her stand alone and short stories.

Charlaine grew up in the South, Tunica Mississippi, where a dying cotton industry gave way to what is now known as 'home of the gambling boats.' She now lives in Southern Arkansas with her husband and three children.

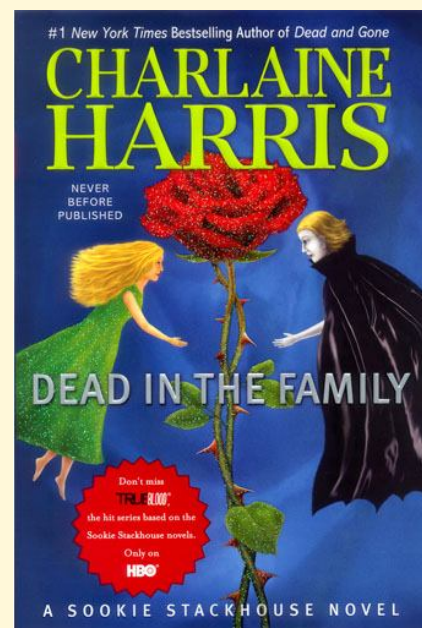
Welcome Charlaine to Romance writer's of Australia's HeartsTalk, We're thrilled to have you! What was it that attracted you to a career in writing, and more specifically, the genre of paranormal?

I always wanted to be a writer, and fortunately for me when I married a second time, my husband offered me the opportunity to take off work and write fulltime. It was a wonderful gesture. I wrote conventional mysteries for many years, but decided it was time for a change about ten years ago. I began including the paranormal in my work. It was a lot of fun to have different rules.

You've created several distinct worlds in your series—can you tell us a bit about your world building process? Do you create the world before writing the stories, or does it happen more organically?

"Organically" would be a nice word for "by the seat of my pants." I seem to start with a very short list of "givens," and then expand as situations arise. This is a lot of fun, but not real smart from a continuity point of view.

(Continued on page 6)



Craft:	
Point of View	p4
Charlaine Harris	
continued	p6
Perth 1 Day Romance	
Seminar	p7
Semi-colons and	
Colons	p8
Adelaide	
Roadshow	p9
Kickboxing and	
Writing.....	p10
Member	
Spotlight	p12
Member News &	
Releases	p13
2010 Conference	
Details	p14
Events	p16
Contest News	p17
After the Call	p18
Market Watch.....	p19



"There is very little about publishing that is actually under your direct control. Try not to fret. Concentrate on what you are able to do—which is to write the best books you possibly can."

Denise Rossetti



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Cover Heart Photo: Rachel Bailey

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March is for Aquamarine

My trusty birthstone website tells me that the beautiful sky-blue gem, Aquamarine, is this month's gem. But did you know that in the medieval era, due to their mystical properties, aquamarine was the stone of choice for crystal balls? Interesting, huh?

No need for crystal balls any longer as far as this year's conference is concerned because March is also the month for everything Sun, Surf and Sizzle—yay! ☺

Your wonderful conference team has been slaving away behind the scenes to bring you a truly fabulous programme. With that and the absolutely stunning location, right on the beach at Coogee, this year—our 19th conference—will be bigger and better than ever. I already know I'm going to have a very hard time choosing which workshops to attend and my brain is already ticking over as I decide which of my fantasies I want to indulge at the cocktail party. ☺

Remember, last year's conference sold out very early so don't delay—get those registrations in now and your hotel room booked!

As part of the conference, the published author day is going ahead as promised on Thursday 12th of August. We are currently finalising the programme, and all the details, including the rego form, will be in next month's Hearts Talk. For those who are already planning ahead and are keen to book flights and accommodation, the day will commence at 10 am.



Live in WA or SA and feel that Sydney is too far to travel? Fear not because there's a Roadshow coming to you! Two teams of volunteers have been working hard to bring a little romance to your doorsteps. Turn to pg 7 for the Romancing the West details and pg 9 for the SA details.

Can't afford any of the above but would still like to go? Don't forget we have the MAF—member's assistance fund—up and running. Application close March 12 though, so hurry! Details in the members section of the website.

In other news from the exec, Barb Jeffcott Geris is undertaking a massive overhaul of our groups scheme. This has been an area in much need of some TLC so watch this space. The New Members Liaison Scheme has taken off like a rocket with 20 new members currently using the service. This is a fantastic result! Many thanks to everyone involved.

Until next month, may the Muse be with you.

AA

Volunteer of the Month!



Carolyn Comito: Contest Judge.
Carolyn wins a Quills duo featuring *The Earl's Dilemma* by Emily May.

Congratulations, Carolyn, and
Thank You!



RWA Groups Update

Our Group Liaison has emailed all groups on our database in the last month. If your Group hasn't had an email or you haven't replied yet, please contact groupliaison@gmail.com so we can ensure our records are kept current.

New Sydney Critique Group

If you're interested in joining a new group to be established in Bondi please email groupliaison@gmail.com

If you'd like to set up a group but don't know where to begin, we have some good resources to get you started.

Vacancies

We have vacancies in the following areas:

Queensland: Brisbane Inner, Eastern Gold Coast, Moreton Bay

New South Wales: Sydney South, Newcastle, Port Macquarie, Coff's Harbour

South Australia: Adelaide

Victoria: Melbourne Central, Wallan

For further information email: groupliaison@gmail.com

Choosing and Switching Viewpoint

by Erica Hayes

Point of view (or PoV, or viewpoint) is one of the most important tools a writer employs. Effective viewpoint can elevate your story from so-so to sparkling, and deliver that 'emotional punch' editors and readers love.

Skilfully handled, viewpoint achieves the following:

- It sets the tone of your story, from sarcastic to sad, from sassy to sexy.
- It controls the flow of information to the reader, creating tension, anticipation, suspense or dread.
- It enhances the reader's emotional experience, by drawing them into the character's feelings and fears.

Fine. I'm in. Give me the basics.

Viewpoint is just that: the point from which the reader views the story. More specifically, the viewpoint character is the person through whose eyes the reader experiences story events.

Traditionally, romances were written solely in the heroine's viewpoint. These days authors have latitude to include other characters, especially the hero. Most recent romances, in both category and single title, are written in *third person limited viewpoint*, with scenes alternating between heroine and hero.

Limited (or *selective*) *viewpoint* confines the reader's experience to the thoughts and feelings of a single character at a time. *Omniscient viewpoint* relates the perspective of all characters, like an all-knowing narrator. These days, most romance authors use limited viewpoint, because it's more immediate and emotional, and they can imbue the writing with their characters' personalities.

Third person means the viewpoint character (let's call him or her the VC) is described as *he* or *she*.

"Sarafina might've been named for the angels, but she'd always known one day she'd end up in hell." (Anya Bast, *Witch Fury* ~ Berkley Sensation, 2009)

In *first person*, the VC describes themselves as *I*.

"Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again." (Daphne DuMaurier, *Rebecca*, 1938)

So first person's okay for romances, then?

Sure. Anything goes. For instance, many chick lit/romances are written in first person, and it's also become the standard for urban fantasy, because it's so immediate. One problem with first person is that it's difficult (though not impossible) to use hero's viewpoint once you've established a first person heroine, and vice versa.

But take care to follow publishers' guidelines, especially for category lines, and above all, *read the books*. If established authors in your chosen line aren't doing it — and check the debut authors, too, because they're great examples of the latest hot thing on the editor's desk — then consider

carefully whether first person is your best choice.

Okay, I get all that. Say I want to use both heroine and hero — how do I choose the best viewpoint character for each scene?

The most accurate (and most annoying!) answer to this question is: *do whatever's best for the story*. Unfortunately, there's no definite rule you can follow.

But you can ask a few preliminary questions to help you decide.



1. Which character has the most at stake emotionally?

This is often used as the test for viewpoint. Who has the most to lose? Who will be the most devastated emotionally (and therefore the most engaging to read about) by the events or revelations that take place in the scene?

Is it the pregnant wife, about to tell her husband she's leaving him, after wringing herself into an emotional wreck about the decision for weeks? Or is it the husband, who has no idea what's about to hit him and doesn't know she's carrying another man's child?

Is it the fearful, inexperienced heroine losing her virginity, learning how delightful a lover's touch can be? Or the rakehell duke, experiencing true emotion during sex for the first time?

As you can see, it's not always an easy answer. So it might help to consider another test:

2. Who has the information you want to impart — or the secrets you want to hide?

Don't play tricks with your reader in limited viewpoint. You must show what your VC's really thinking and feeling. If later on you go, 'Aha! Gotcha! He was really thinking THIS!' then your book will hit the wall before you can say *cheap surprise*.

Think of limited viewpoint as putting your VC in the witness box: he'll tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Which means:

- You can only show the reader the information the VC has. If the character doesn't know or see or hear something, he can't share it with the reader. This means he can't talk about his own dark eyes or note his own dazzling smile. It also means he can't know for sure what other characters are thinking, feeling or plotting in secret. This is one of the most important reasons it becomes necessary to switch viewpoint — to impart information your VC doesn't have.
- You must show the reader all the information the VC has. Characters can be in denial, and refuse to admit crucial facts, but they don't lie to themselves, not in their hearts. By all means, show your hero resisting the heroine's charms by pretending to be cold

Erica Hayes

Choosing and Switching Viewpoint

continued...

towards her. But if you're using that hero's viewpoint, don't try to fool the reader into thinking he's truly unaffected by her. It's a cheap trick and it never works — it only leaves the reader frustrated.

So, using that example, if you really want the reader to think the hero is immune to her charms, you can't use his viewpoint in that scene. But if you want the reader to know he's hot for her, you need to use his viewpoint, or at least give the heroine good reason for suspecting his coldness to be an act. And, more importantly, if you want the reader to know WHY he's resisting her despite his attraction, you definitely need his viewpoint, because you're imparting information the heroine can't possibly know — the hero's motivation. She can't read his mind, and you can't expect the reader to either.

Which leads to the third and final test:

3. What's the effect you're aiming for?

Think for a moment about that example. What will be more effective for the reader later on? A surprise when the hero finally confesses his love — the reader never saw it coming? (Okay, so it's a romance, but we're allowed a smidgin of mystery, right?) Or, the when's-he-gonna-do-it approach — the readers know he's holding himself back, and they're just waiting for the moment when he'll break?

The answer will depend on your story. But most often in romances, the second option is more sensually charged and more emotionally engaging. If you use two viewpoints in succession, you can *show the reader things the characters haven't yet figured out*. It's called *dramatic irony*, and it changes your story from a 'what's-gonna-happen' to a 'when-and-how's-it-gonna-happen'. In a romance or a murder mystery, where we already know the destination but want to experience the journey, this is a great tool for creating suspense that isn't really there.

A simple set-up runs something like this:

Scene A. Heroine's viewpoint. They argue, almost kiss, hero pushes her away and walks out. She's bewildered: why is he so cold towards her? It must be because [show heroine's conflict here].

Scene B. Cut immediately to hero's viewpoint, same scene. He's walking away, remembering how wonderful she felt in his arms. How can he ever resist her? But he must, because [show hero's conflict here].

See the effect you're creating? When Scene C then cuts back to the heroine's viewpoint, the *reader* understands why the hero's treating her this way, and what he's really thinking, *but the heroine doesn't*. It's a wonderful way to create suspense out of conflict, while keeping the characters' motivations solid and understandable.

So how do I switch viewpoint? And what's this head-hopping thing?

Some writers don't switch viewpoint until chapter's end, or at least the end of a scene. They leave a line of white space and start with the new viewpoint character. Others change viewpoint mid-scene without white space. However you choose to do it, it's important that you make it immediately clear whose viewpoint you're in. Otherwise, the reader will get confused, and allegations of 'head-hopping' will spear your way — that's the confused effect created when the viewpoint changes too many times too quickly.

Swift viewpoint changes with no white space probably aren't a good idea when you're trying for first publication. Yes, Nora Roberts does it. But you and I are not Nora Roberts. Worry about the tricky stuff later. It's better for now to show editors that you have a clear understanding of how to write solidly in limited viewpoint.

And that means your transitions must be crystal clear.

The first line of any new viewpoint must show exactly who's involved. You can do this by 1) using the VC's name; and 2) showing the VC's emotion, sensation or thought. That is, show something the previous VC couldn't possibly experience. For example:

"Patrizio moved to the other side of the room and stared sightlessly out of the window." (Melanie Milburne, *Innocent Wife, Baby of Shame* ~ HM&B Sexy, 2007)

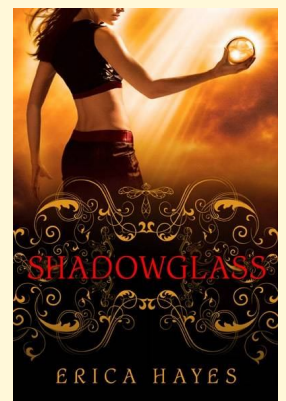
Milburne uses viewpoint shifts with no white space. But it's immediately clear that this is Patrizio's viewpoint — how could the heroine know his gaze is sightless?

"Sienna watched through hot eyes as Lex strode down the aisle away from her, her mind whirling..." (Kelly Hunter, *Playboy Boss, Live-In Mistress* ~ HM&B Sexy Sensation, 2008)

Here Hunter uses action (watched), sensation (hot eyes) and thought (her mind whirling) to show that the viewpoint has switched to the heroine.

Got all that? Whew. To recap:

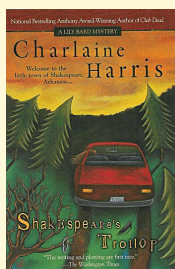
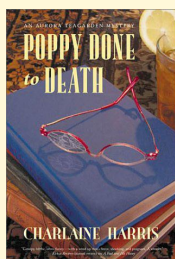
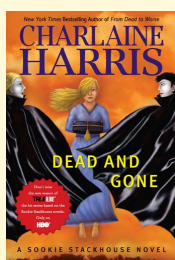
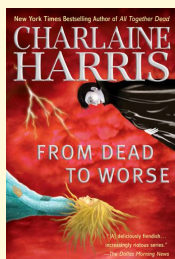
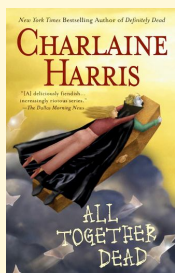
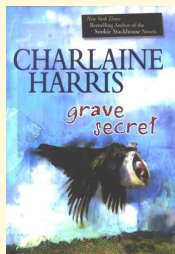
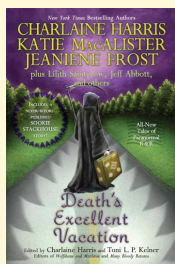
- **Keep it simple** — for starters, stick to limited third person hero and heroine.
- **Keep it clear** — that first sentence has to nail exactly who's in the frame.
- **Keep it truthful** — you can hide things from other characters, but not from the reader.



Shadowglass will be out 2nd March, 2010. Visit Erica at www.shadowfae.net/ for news and a FREE short story.

Charlaine Harris

(Continued from page 1)



You're probably best known for Sookie, the telepathic barmaid heroine, and the television adaptation of the Sookie books, True Blood. Could you tell us the reason behind your Southern, small town setting as opposed to the popular urban series theme?

I love little places, myself, and it was part of the fun of writing the first Sookie book that I was fitting vampires into a little town. When I began the series, you remember, there simply wasn't the wealth of paranormal and urban fantasy novels that there is today.

Did you set out to make it a series when you first started Sookie's story?

I hoped to, but Ace only signed me for DEAD UNTIL DARK, which had been turned down by many other publishers. Until it came out, I wasn't sure I'd ever get to write another book about her.

I love the Southern quirkiness of your characters. What other key elements of your Sookie series do you think draws readers in?

I think people are reassured by Sookie's day-to-day struggle to keep her head above water financially, to cope with the aggravations and troubles of her daily life; these are familiar problems to most readers. I think they also admire Sookie's character, and I think they envy her love life.

As writers, we usually have a strong visual picture of what our characters look like. Did any of the True Blood actors fit your original image of the character?

Chris Bauer, who plays Andy Bellefleur, is a dead ringer. Most of the others are different in some way or another, but I knew that was going to happen. The actors make the roles their own, and they become the character in a very real sense.

There have been some major changes to the storyline and characters of True Blood—particularly Lafayette and Tara, whose storylines have taken very different paths. Did you have any input with these? And have these changes had any impact on future works in the series?

No, we keep the work completely separate. Alan's writers don't check with me about their scripts, and I don't check with them about the content of the books. I knew the show would take on its own life, and it has. Since I'm many books ahead of the action in the TV show, it really

doesn't have any effect on what I'm doing.

You have another heroine with an unusual ability, Harper Connelly. Could you tell us about this character and her story?

Harper Connelly is completely different from anyone I've ever written. She's had an awful adolescence, and watched her mother disintegrate into drug addiction and immorality. Also, Harper gets struck by lightning, which leaves her with a strange ability. She can find bodies and see their last moment of life. She and her stepbrother learn how to market this ability, and each book brings them a new mystery to solve.

When you're reading for pleasure, what genre books do you read?

I read mysteries, urban fantasy, science fiction, some non-fiction, some romance.

Can you tell us about an average writing day for you?

I'm not sure there is such a thing as an average day. My work life has changed so much in the past two years. Ideally, I come over to my office around eight in the morning, work until eleven thirty or so, break for lunch and errands, and get back to work around one. I stop working around three or four in the afternoon. If it's a great day, I get eight new pages.

You're coming to Australia in September for a True Blood convention. Sounds fantastic! For any members who might be able to make it, what can they expect from the convention?

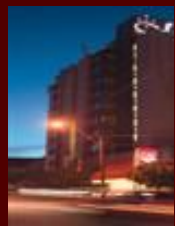
Truly, I have no idea. I'm looking forward to it myself.

What does the future hold for Charlaine Harris fans? More Sookie books? Any new series to be unveiled?

I've signed to write three more Sookie books after book ten, DEAD IN THE FAMILY, which will be out in the US next May 4. I'm sure I'll start another book after I write Sookie 11, but what that book will be, I don't yet know. I have a couple of ideas.



Author photo © Caroline Grayslock



Romancing the West

Saturday May 1

The **Romancing The West** mini-conference is back for its third fabulous year with a brand new name. Featuring some of Australia's leading romance (and romance-element) authors, this **1 day event** will be held **Saturday May 1st** at **Metro Hotel, South Perth**.



Headline Speakers:



Fiona Lowe – Harlequin Mills & Boon Medical author and 2007 Finalist for Romantic Book of the Year (R♥BY).

Juliet Marillier – published by Pan Macmillan and three time winner of the *Aurealis Award for Best Fantasy Novel*. Her books include historical fiction, folkloric fantasy, romance and family drama.



Fiona Palmer – published by Penguin, her debut novel *The Family Farm* was released in 2009 and contains strong romantic elements.

Nikki Logan – WA's first Harlequin Mills & Boon author. Her debut *Lights, Cameras... Kiss The Boss*, is released this month.



Workshop Topics:

Finding your Voice

Voice is one of the hardest aspects of writing to define and to develop. In this workshop you will discuss what elements combine to create Voice, how to use Voice to give your work character, and how every writer can develop her own distinct personal Voice.

Branding: Why you need it before you sell

There is so much more to effective branding than a pretty website and a cute tag-line. Working out who you are as a writer and what you want to say is an important part of the business and then this must be effectively communicated to editors and agents. Branding

is not something you want to leave until after you sell. This workshop will look at examples of effective (and not so effective) branding in the romance sector and help participants identify what their brand is.

History, guesswork and wild imagination: Creating believable historical settings in your fiction

This workshop is about researching your setting; how much detail is too much; how to create believable romantic relationships for the age and how to make dialogue tell the story of the time.

Fabulous First Chap and Para

This workshop will look at what a first chapter should do to wow an editor and/or agent and what it should set up for the rest of the novel. Let's face it,

if you don't nail the first chapter, you won't sell.

Conflict and Finding the Zen of your Back story

Using examples from film, learn how to create a compelling start to your story, one that will keep your readers reading despite the fact the dinner is burning, the kids are calling and a work presentation needs preparing.

Tension....how to write a Page Turner and avoid a soggy middle

This hands-on workshop complete with worksheets builds on the elements discussed in Conflict and Finding the Zen of your Back Story but can easily be taken as a 'stand alone' workshop. Learn how to create tension and raise the emotional stakes until the last page.

In addition to a jam-packed day of writing craft, there'll also be an author panel (combining speakers and other WA authors) at the end of the day, lots of prizes and giveaways, delicious morning tea, afternoon tea and lunch as well as an optional networking dinner in the evening.

Last year we had a few interstate delegates and one all the way from Europe. With airlines offering discount flights like never before, why not treat yourself to a weekend in Perth – one that can actually be considered useful as well as a relaxing getaway. Suitable for both experienced and aspiring authors, it's a day no writer should miss!

The Details:

Saturday 1st May 2010 | Metro Hotel | 61 Canning Hwy, Perth

Cost:	Pay before 1 st April 2010	After 1 st April
RWA Members	\$100	\$110
Non-Members	\$110	\$120

Prices include lunch, morning and afternoon tea
Dinner – set menu (more information on the website)



For further information

on presenters and tutorial topics:

www.romanceaustralia.com

Claire at lcoboston@bigpond.com or
Michelle at michellediener@gmail.com

Separating the semi-colon; from the colon

by Enisa Hasic

Good writing includes the use of commas and full stops. Less frequent but nevertheless of vital importance in good writing is the use of colons and semi-colons. These punctuation marks add variety to the structure and length of sentences, ultimately improving their flow.

Colons and semi-colons appear very similar but in fact act entirely differently. It is because of this combination of similarity and difference that they are very often misunderstood and through this misunderstanding used incorrectly, adding confusion to both the writing and the reader. In this article I aim to clarify the functions of colons and semi-colons with the use of examples that show these functions clearly.

The colon (:) consists of two dots, one above the other. It can be used:

To introduce a list of items.

Concertgoers will not be allowed to bring two things: cameras and recorders.

Leanne needed to buy a few things for her trip to the beach: sun glasses, suntan lotion, a beach towel and a swimming costume. Allie needed to bring a few things to attend the workshop: a laptop, pens and paper.

The first part of the sentences reveals that there are items. The colon reveals the items.

To introduce the definition or explanation of something.

Cormac McCarthy: a Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

House: free-standing dwelling. After the defendant entered a 'guilty' plea, the judge ruled his sentence: 25 years in prison.

To introduce indented quotations and quotations that come after grammatically complete sentences.

Eugenie adhered to wise words: "Ask and you shall receive."

Note that when introducing a quote with a

The semi-colon (;) consists of a comma with a dot above it. Creating a pause in a sentence, it is used:

To link two independent clauses (two clauses that are in fact separate sentences) without the use of a conjunction such as 'and' or 'but'.

Lily reads romantic suspense; Sally reads historical sagas.

These two clauses can be separate sentences: "Lily reads inspirational romances. Sally reads historical sagas." However, when the sentences are related or follow on with the same thought, a semi-colon assists the reader.

Simon searched for a job; he needed the money.

*Note that semi-colons are not used to link clauses that are not closely related.

To join two clauses using a conjunctive adverb such as therefore, however.

Phil Collins was the lead singer of Genesis; however he sang solo too.

The editor rejected Suzanne's chick-lit romance; on the other hand she accepted her paranormal manuscript.

Debra Webb writes for Harlequin Intrigue; in addition she writes mainstream romantic suspense.

Sam Worthington is Australian; however, he works in the United States.

*Note that the semi-colon comes before the conjunctive adverb and a comma follows the conjunctive adverb.

In lists where commas are already present.

The Prime Minister will be visiting the following destinations: Honolulu, Hawaii; San Francisco, California; and Las Vegas, Nevada.

verb such as said, say, stated, etc, a comma is preferable. Eg.. Gemma said, "Write what you love to read."

To separate a book title from its subtitle.

The Avenger: Callan

Act as part of a business letter salutation.

To Whom It May Concern:

Separate the hour and the minutes in time notation.

1:30 p.m.

After a short introductory word or phrase.

Caution: Slippery when wet.

Note: This medication may cause drowsiness.

Incorrect colon use

However a colon is used, it can't immediately follow a verb. Following are examples of incorrect colon use:

Julie saw AC/DC in concert in Sydney: seeing the band live on stage was her ultimate dream.

In this example, the colon is separating two independent clauses. The correct punctuation mark to use here is the semi-colon.

Carly's favourite authors are: Linda Howard, Karen Rose and Erica Spindler.

In this example, the colon is not preceded by a complete sentence. Here punctuation is not required. It is sufficient to just write the list.

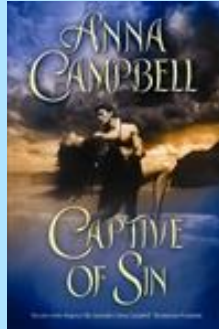
By learning the above rules for colons and semi-colons, writers can then use them correctly and their writing will be transformed from good to great.

Enisa Hasic, winner of RWA 2009 First Kiss Contest, is currently working on her next romantic suspense manuscript while anxiously awaiting word on an agent query.

RWAustralia together with SARA present the 2010 Romance Roadshow Event

~Romancing the Novel~

Featuring special guest speakers – Anna Campbell and Yvonne Lindsay!



Plus local talents:
Elizabeth Rolls
Anne Oliver
Claire Baxter
Trish Morey
and more!



This one day intensive promises something for every writer, starting out or experienced.

Venue: SA Writers' Centre

Date: Saturday May 15

Cost: \$125 includes lunch, morning and afternoon tea

Optional dinner: Details tba

Further details: www.southaustralianromanceauthors.weebly.com
www.romanceaustralia.com

The Art Of Romantic Comedy

A two day seminar with MICHAEL HAUGE and STEVE KAPLAN

In June, world acclaimed film writing instructors Michael Hauge and Steve Kaplan will return to Australia to share the stage in presenting an exclusive weekend seminar on writing a romantic comedy. The two day, 18 hour class has been developed with Epiphany International Artists and Inscription as a world exclusive.

*RWA has negotiated a special offer for our members to receive early bird prices! But you *must* follow the process that will be announced soon. Keep an eye on our blog.*

Sydney: June 19/20 Atrium Theatre, Australian Technology Park
Melbourne: June 26/27 Melbourne Conference & Exhibition Centre

For more information on the seminar: www.epiphany.com.au/

For more information on how to book: keep an eye on the RWA blog. We'll post details there ASAP.

Writing Romance That Kicks Ass

By Susy Rogers

How is romance writing like kickboxing? Let me count the ways. Sure, there are a couple of minor differences – one is slightly more sedentary than the other and computers don't play a huge role in boxing rings – but overall romance writing shares the same principles as kickboxing.

Sticking at it

There's a sign at the martial arts gym where I train which says: *A black belt is a white belt who never gave up.* That describes me perfectly. As a child I couldn't run, catch or throw so consequently was never picked for any sports teams, but I didn't let this stand in my way when I took up kickboxing as an adult. I earned my black belt and took it a step further, achieving a second degree black belt.

It's exactly the same with romance writing. If you want to succeed, you have to stick at it. You can't give up. Countless articles in this journal and many others state that persistence is one of the key traits among successful writers.

Novelist Anna Jacobs spent ten years writing before she had a novel picked up by Random House but she didn't give up. With over 40 sagas and modern novels published, she achieved her black belt in writing long ago but hasn't forgotten how hard it was when she was starting off.

She still remembers how one day her husband asked her lovingly what she would do if she never got published. She felt a surge of energy zap through her and said fiercely, "I will get published. I will!" – and she did. It was the sixth full book she'd written that hit the target.

Anna says writing is a two-way road. "You put effort and time into your story and it gives back to you in so many ways – satisfaction even to complete an unpublished novel, sheer pleasure at telling these stories



and a creative way to spend the time that is good exercise for the brain. And when you hold your first 'book baby' in your hands, well, there's nothing quite like it."

The importance of practice

The way to get good at any martial art is to practise. It's not easy to leave my wonderful family and comfortable living room to train in the evenings, harder still when it's pouring with rain, but I do it. At my martial arts club, we practise the same moves over and over again till we get good. We keep practising. Sound familiar?

It's the same for writers. It's hard to find the time to write when we have jobs, families and all the other pressures of everyday life – some people even have a social life – but as writers we are doing the same thing: practising our craft.

All of this takes discipline, though I prefer to look at it as a decision about how I spend my time. I can choose to go to my favourite café or I can elect to sit at my desk and write. As much as I love cheesecake and cappuccino, it isn't going to help me get published.

Improvement

However, practice on its own isn't enough. My kickboxing teacher says what you practice you get to keep. If you do the same moves repeatedly with bad form, that's exactly what you'll get – bad form. But if you train properly, you'll improve and become a better martial artist.

It is for those same reasons that writers read how-to books, find information on the web, join critiquing groups and go to conferences. If we didn't, we'd probably write the same book over and over again with the same shortcomings, but that's not what we want to do. The aim is for continual improvement, and that goes for both published and unpublished writers.

Silhouette Desire author Yvonne Lindsay says, "Anyone who achieves great things in their career has to work hard at it, and keep working hard at it, not matter what they do. After all, look at doctors and lawyers – even after they get their degrees and even if they specialise, they're still 'practising' aren't they? There are always ways to improve and grow your craft."

The power of the mind

The way to get better at kickboxing is by using your head, not your fists – and, no, I'm not talking about head-butting. The process starts with an awareness that there might be an improved way of doing things and builds up to a higher level of understanding which you can then use in the execution.

It's the same with writing. You have to be able to see it before you can do

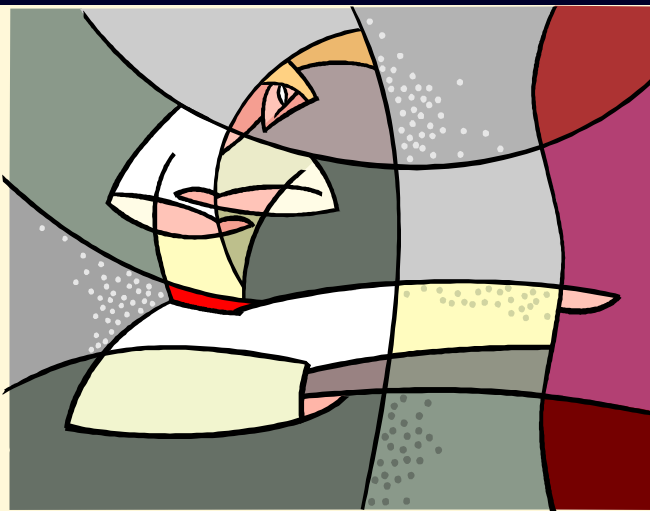
it. I can certainly see the beauty, grace and emotion in Nora Roberts's books, and that is an excellent first step as it provides a benchmark and shows what to aim for. The next step is more difficult because it involves working out how all that beauty, grace and emotion is achieved. It gets harder still when you try to use that information to add depth to your characters, twists to your plot and improvements to your story. The point is that the process of continual improvement in writing starts with a sense that there might be a better, more powerful or more emotional way of writing the story.

This doesn't mean romance writers should all try to be Nora Roberts clones. In fact, many literary agents say they are not looking for a new writer who emulates someone else who's already on their books. Your writing still has to be individual, written in your own voice and from your own heart, or it simply won't cut it.

One thing at a time

In kickboxing, if I'm practising a straight punch, there are many aspects I can look at: pushing off the back foot, distance, retraction, body turn, shifting my weight, hand speed, hitting with my whole body...the list goes on. If I tried to concentrate on everything at once, I'd end up practising nothing. The usual method is to pick one aspect, train it in for a while, then move on to the next, then the one after that, till you come back to the beginning and do it all over again. Some people find this boring and they're usually the ones who give up along the way. Me, I never get bored, because I can see I'm improving and building in good form and that gives me incredible satisfaction.

Writing is exactly the same. It's an endless process of improvement. We look at: our opening paragraphs,



chapter hooks, dialogue, character development, adding barriers to the heroine's goal, examining her motivation, generating more emotion, adding sensuality...and, once again, the list goes on. We go through each aspect and when we're done, we do it all over again, because it's the only way to improve. We are continually building on our craft.

Once more with feeling

Whatever you do, do it with passion and intensity and feeling. Tell your story with richness and depth and layers of emotion. Harlequin Presents/ Sexy Romance author Trish Morey is well known for persisting at writing for 11 years before being published.

When asked what aspect of her writing had changed when she was finally accepted, she said, "I'd had the worst year of my life, trouble with the boss from hell at work and then my husband was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia.

"Going through the fall out with four kids aged 6 to 12, I wasn't able to write for six months, after which I simply had to. And then I think all that grief and emotion poured into my writing and into a story that became both a 2002 Golden Heart finalist and a published manuscript. Finally it seemed, I'd worked out what the editors meant when they talked emotional punch. You have to dig deep into emotional wants and needs and hurts and not just skate over the surface if you are looking for true emotional intensity.

"You have to feel."

Kickboxing relies on the same principles. If you're attacked and forced to defend yourself, you'd better hit back like you mean it. I'm not a naturally violent person but I layer in a level of aggression and intensity into my training to show I mean business. It's one thing to throw a punch, another to fire it in with intensity.

Reaching the top

An amazing thing happens when you see someone at the top of their game, whether they're a martial artist or a writer. They make it look easy.

I'm a big fan of Tami Hoag and Tess Gerritsen, both of whom write books which are so superbly crafted, they make it look effortless. I make no claim to brilliance as either a writer or a kickboxer, so this is not my area of expertise, but I am certain it takes a lot of work to make something look so easy.

Just the beginning

My kickboxing teacher also says your black belt is just the beginning and he's right. Many people think having a black belt means you can fight off multiple knife-wielding attackers at the one time but it doesn't work that way. It simply means you've reached a particular skill level, and I can guarantee that when you get there, you'll see just how much more there is to learn.

I rest my case. Romance writing is exactly the same as kickboxing.

So how do you get your black belt? The same way you get published – keep practising and live long enough.



Susy Rogers writes contemporary romances and suspense thrillers but doesn't have her black belt in writing and hasn't yet been published. She can be contacted on roger2@globaldial.com.

We'd like to introduce you to Melbourne Copywriter,

Madeline Williams

How long have you been a member of RWA?

Only a year now, but I was writing romance (blindly, it feels now) for a couple of years beforehand.

In which genre do you mainly write and what attracted you to it?

In terms of actual finger-to-keys writing, I write heavily in the romance genre. The underrated skill involved in creating believable tension between the hero and heroine, motivations to keep them apart, and a resolution that is as unpredictable as can be expected in romance, is an inescapable lure for me. I find the art of convincing readers to barrack for the romance between the hero and heroine very delicate, and challenge myself to one day achieve such a feat.

However, many of my writing journals are filled with romantic fantasy.

Do you belong to a critique group?

I'm proud to say that I do. A supportive mixed group with eyes like hawks and a sensitive approach to the issue of Writer's Pride. They give me great confidence in my manuscripts before I submit them to Mills & Boon, and each month I gain invaluable knowledge, not only from their critiques, but from their own work.

Can you tell us about your writing degree and what kinds of jobs you have held?

I started out as a florist assistant in high school. Then during my uni years, I took up swimming instructing, which I adored. The kids would get so excited about their lessons, that it was always a delight to share such a special part of their day.

Once I finished my professional writing degree, I fell into a copywriting position for an online career advice company.



Your day job involves non-fiction writing. How do you switch over to fiction?

Initially I found it difficult. There didn't seem to be enough space in my mind for two brainstorm trains to run simultaneously.

Outside of work hours, I was often worrying about what article I could write the next day, instead of allowing my imagination to dart off into the realm of romantic fiction.

It was also tricky because I work from home. So sitting down at the same table for both non-fiction and fiction prevented an easy switch between the two.

In the end, my system was to change the atmosphere depending on the genre: for fiction, I would put on particular music, change my position at the table, set some flowers next to me, dress out of 'work' clothes, and so on. It's all about falling into the right mental zone for each genre.

Can you tell us about your experience with the iHearts Presents online community?

I first stumbled across *iHearts Presents* when a friend told me of their Instant Seduction writing competition. I entered their comp and community simultaneously, amazed by their support of newcomers. For any romance writers who can sometimes feel isolated by their work, the encouragement on *iHearts* is a life saver.

Are there any books you've read that have really stuck in your mind?

I am head-over-heels for fantasy sagas. The romance embedded in such epic quests is often arduous yet irrevocable.

The unique romance woven through Robin Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* and *The Tawny Man Trilogy* has widened my perception of possible romantic relationships. The hauntingly beautiful historical fantasies of Juliet Marillier have also stuck with me years after reading them.

You're nine years old and dreaming of what you want to be when you grow up.

At nine, I wanted to be an actor. A few years later, I decided that I wanted to be a writer, whose best-selling novel gets turned into a film, and I act as the main character! Now, I'm quite content to narrow those dreams down to simply being a published writer.

How many manuscripts have you written?

I've completed eight manuscripts, and have abandoned another seven a third of the way through. Just last week Mills & Boon requested my first full manuscript. Fingers crossed!

Send your news and releases to: HTgoodnews@romanceaustralia.com by the 15th of the previous month. Please note that new releases will only be featured once, so authors may choose whether that's their Australian, overseas, digital or print release.

Member News

THE CALLS:

Sue McKay accepted a 2 book deal with M&B Medicals.

Janette Whitehead sold a paranormal mystery to Carina Press.

Mel Scott accepted a 3 book deal with Ace/Roc (Penguin's fantasy line) for her steampunk fantasy/romance and 2 sequels.

THE WINS:

Bec Sampson w/a Becca J Heath won the contemporary series section of The West Houston Emily contest. Full mss has been requested by Patience Smith of Silhouette.

Anne Newton won the Single Title category of the Cleveland Rocks contest.

Maree Anderson placed 2nd in the Oklahoma Romance Writers Finally A Bride contest, with a YA paranormal.

Helen Lacey placed 3rd in the RWA Silicon Valley Gotcha! Contest in the Series Contemporary section.

Louise Groarke placed 4th in the RWA Silicon Valley Gotcha! Contest in the Series Contemporary section.

THE SALES:

Heather Brown sold *A Savage Lust* to Noble Romance.

Shona Husk sold paranormal romance novella *Boyfriend in a Bottle* to Samhain. Scheduled for a May release.

Annie West sold her 12th story to HMB for Modern/Sexy. *Passion, Purity and the Prince* will be a Sept UK release.

THE FINALS:

Kylie Griffin finalised in the Chase The Dream contest.

Sue Webb finalised in the Linda Howard Award of Excellence, Romantic Sensual & Sizzling Category.

THE MISC:

Anna Jacobs has climbed from 8th to 7th most borrowed author of adult fiction in the UK. Anna is also the 19th most borrowed author in the all-fiction list.

Allison Rushby signed with a new US agent, Sara Megibow at The Nelson Agency.

Margaret Tanner's novel *The Trouble With Playboys* came third in the latest Predators and Editors poll.

Anna Jacobs's *In Focus* received an outstanding review from Booklist, premiere reviewer for US library system.

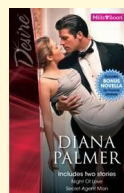
Member New Releases



Jennie Adams
AUSTRALIAN
BOSS: DIAMOND
RING
HM&B Sweet



Daphne Clare
HIS TROPHY
MISTRESS
in MISTRESS
MATERIAL
HMB Specials



Yvonne Lindsay
THE
BILLIONAIRE'S
PROXY
Novella in
HMB Specials



Margaret Tanner
WILD OATS
Wild Rose Press



Rachel Bailey
THE BLACKMAILED
BRIDE'S SECRET
CHILD
M&B Desire



Daphne Clare
TAKEN BY THE
PIRATE TYCOON
M&B Sexy



Nikki Logan
LIGHTS,
CAMERA ... KISS
THE BOSS
HM&B Sweet



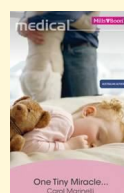
Angela Verdenius
LOVE, HEART AND
SOUL MOMENTS
Wings ePress



Heather Brown
HOT DAMN!
Noble Romance



Lucy Clark
A BABY TO
CARE FOR
HMB Medical



Carol Marinelli
ONE TINY
MIRACLE
HM&B Medical



Meredith Webber
WEDDING AT GOLD
CREEK & ONE OF
THE FAMILY
M&B Bestseller
Collection



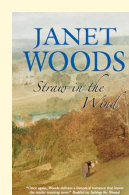
Heather Brown
LONG ,HOT,
DELICIOUS
SLIDE
Noble Romance



Erica Hayes
SHADOWGLASS
St Martin's Griffin



Fiona McArthur
MIDWIFE IN A
MILLION
HM&B Medical



Janet Woods
STRAW IN THE
WIND
Severn House



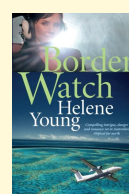
Heather Brown
MY PURR-
FECT ALPHAS
Noble Romance



Vonnice Hughes
COMING HOME
Robert Hale



Trish Morey
HIS MISTRESS
FOR A MILLION
M&B Sexy



Helene Young
BORDER WATCH
Hachette Australia

Sun, Surf and Sizzle

13 to 15 August, Sydney

Sun? August is a great time in Sydney, not too hot but with spring raring to make an appearance. **Surf?** Our hotel is smack across the road from the beach. **Sizzle?** You betcha, with romance writers from Australia and around the world gathering for RWA's 19th annual conference at the gorgeous Crowne Plaza Hotel, Coojee Beach.

The conference is a fabulous opportunity to learn, network and have a ball running with our "pack"—other writers and industry professionals who "get" what we do. The conference is an action-packed three days of buzz and inspiration to keep you going throughout the rest of the year while you sit at your computers and write, write, write. Don't miss out!

Conference open!

Registrations are now open. You'll find all the forms and information you need to register and book your accommodation in this edition of HT. Forms and updated information will also be posted on the website.

We have an incredible line up of presenters for you this year with both overseas guests and our amazing local authors and publishing professionals. With six months to go until conference, we are still confirming with some editors and agents—watch this space!

Speakers

First of our overseas guests, New York Times bestseller Vicki Lewis Thompson, writes both category and single title contemporary romance. Also joining us from the US is author, publisher and trainer Debra Dixon. From New Zealand, another New York Times bestseller Nalini Singh. We've watched Nalini's career skyrocket from the days she was a winner of our RWA competitions to today's single title success.

Then there's New York based agent Jennifer Schober from Spencerhill Associates, who will be also taking pitches. Publisher Bernadette Foley from Hachette Australia will also be our guest and taking pitches. We're hoping to hear soon about an editor from Harlequin.

Workshops

We think you'll find it difficult to choose from our workshops, with a range of topics to appeal to newbies and the multi-published. You can book for workshops



that range from writing deep point of view to how to stage a fight scene to creating a video trailer for your new release. If only we had time and room for more!

Friday workshop

The full day RWA Friday workshop has become an event people talk about for years afterwards. This year is sure to live up to the Friday workshop's awesome reputation.

Until now, you had to go to the US to attend one of Debra Dixon's legendary workshops. We're flying her here to take you through her "Book-In-A-Day" workshop. "It provides the tools a writer needs to shape a story and create a road map to writing it," Deb explains. "The intensive workshop covers the three most important elements of popular fiction—goal, motivation and conflict (GMC), and how those elements work with the mythic structure of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey to help writers conceive and create strong plots and compelling characters."

Your conference coordinators are desperately hoping we'll get the time to join in!

Pitches

Pitches will be held by both editors and agents in both group and single appointments. You must have a full manuscript to pitch. Pitching appointments are limited. However, we will do our best to give each delegate the opportunity to pitch to one editor and one agent—please mark your preferences on the registration form. Watch Hearts Talk and the website for breaking news on more editors and agents.

Harlequin's "Fantasy Island" Cocktail Party

The fun starts on Friday evening with the fancy dress party generously sponsored by Harlequin.

As we're talking "Sun, Surf & Sizzle", our theme for the party is "Fantasy Island". Unleash your imagination and come dressed as your favourite fantasy. As our members write everything from sweet to smoking hot, we're looking forward to seeing your costumes! You don't have to dress up, but a costume can work really well as an ice breaker.

Hotel

This year we're back at the wonderful Crowne Plaza, Coogee Beach, 242 Arden St Coogee, 2034. The hotel is directly opposite the beach. It's had a complete upgrade since our conference was held there so is even better than our first visit. Coogee itself has lots of nice cafés and it's only a quick bus ride into the city. Show Group has secured us a great deal for conference accommodation (see details on the form in this issue). Check out the hotel for yourself at www.CrownePlaza.com.



Alternate accommodation

There are several other hotels in Coogee. Show Group has negotiated a special rate for delegates at the Coogee Sands Apartments & Hotel and at the Medina Executive Coogee. See details on the booking form in this issue.

Parking and transport

Parking at the Crowne Plaza for our delegates is available at the very reasonable cost (for Sydney!) of \$15 per day.

Coogee is around a 20 minute taxi ride from the airport costing around \$22. Bus transport is a tad circuitous and involves a change. There is a shuttle going from the hotel to the airport at a cost of \$12 per person but not going from the airport to the hotel.

Foodies

People with specific food requirements will be catered for at the hotel—see the section on the registration form.

Stay tuned...

Over the next months we'll be updating conference news via regular articles in HT. Keep an eye on the website, too, for regular updates.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to email your conference coordinators on conference@romanceaustralia.com and we'll do our best to help.

Please remember, as with most positions in RWA, the conference committee are all volunteers with lives and responsibilities outside the organisation. We ask that you bear this in mind with any communications.

www.romanceaustralia.com

Meet our speakers

Vicki Lewis Thompson

New York Times bestseller, Vicki Lewis Thompson, believes love makes the world go around and laughter makes the trip worth taking. She is the author of more than 90 books, both single title and category. Vicki pioneered a new kind of romance hero with *Nerd in Shining Armor*. Following the success of her nerd stories, Vicki launched a paranormal series starting with *Over Hexed* that has also delighted countless fans. We heard Vicki speak at one of the Romance Writers of America conferences and found her as warm and witty as her books. Read more about Vicki at www.vickilewisthompson.com



Debra Dixon

Debra Dixon describes herself as "One woman. Lots of hats." She is a best-selling romance author, a publisher and an in-demand speaker. Her "how-to" book *GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict* (Gryphon Books) based on her popular workshop, has become a writer's must-have. She is also the publisher of BelleBooks and Bell Bridge Books and is at our conference in that capacity as well, taking a limited number of pitches. Deb will be giving our Friday workshop but also sharing her wisdom over the weekend. Read more about Deb at www.debradixon.com



Nalini Singh

Nalini Singh was first published in category, then hit the New York Times Bestseller list with her single title paranormal Psy/Changeling Series starting with *Slave to Sensation*. This was followed by the Guild Hunter series with *Angel's Blood*. Nalini hails from New Zealand and we can't help claiming her as a southern hemisphere super star! Read more about Nalini at www.nalinisingh.com



Jennifer Schober

Jennifer Schober is a romance-friendly literary agent at Spencerhill Associates in New York. Jennifer will be speaking at the conference as well as taking pitches. She's looking for books with an emotional hook, fantastic storytelling and dynamic characters that leap off the page. Jennifer is accepting submissions in women's fiction including literary fiction, category, contemporary, historical, historical romance, erotic and paranormal romance, romantic suspense, and YA as well as urban fantasy. www.spencerhillassociates.com



Bernadette Foley

Bernadette Foley, Publisher Hachette Australia, is returning to our conference having discovered new authors on her previous visits. She will be both speaking and taking pitches. Says Bernadette: "I am looking for commercial women's fiction, including romance suspense. I'm also looking for fantasy, including urban fantasy, and paranormal romance manuscripts. Most of all, I'm looking for engaging stories that are well told and credible characters who will stay in the readers' minds."



Send your events to: HTevents@romanceaustralia.com by the 15th of the month prior to your event.

In Person Events

(Costings Code: M-member. MC-Member concession. NM-Non-members.)

@ Saturday March 13

From a whisper to a scream: subtlety, clarity and the writing craft: fiction workshop ~

Lisa Lang

When: 1:00--4:00pm

Where: KSP Writers' Centre, WA

Cost: \$25 M, \$40 NM.

FMI + Bookings: Essential.

[http://kspf.iinet.net.au/](http://kspf.iinet.net.au/events.html#mar)

[events.html#mar](http://kspf.iinet.net.au/events.html#mar) OR

kspfevents@iinet.net.au

OR (08) 9294 1872

@ Sunday March 14

Shameless self promotion ~

Craig Cormick, Marcus Amann & Harry Laing

When: 10:00am--4:00pm

Where: ACT Writers' Centre

Cost: \$80 M, \$70 MC, \$130 NM

FMI + Bookings:

[www.actwriters.org.au/](http://www.actwriters.org.au/workshops2010.html)

[workshops2010.html](http://www.actwriters.org.au/workshops2010.html)

OR (02) 6262 9191

@ Sunday March 21

The Opportunities of Romance Fiction ~ Anne Gracie

When: 10:00am--4:00pm

Where: NSW Writers' Centre

Cost: \$100 M, \$85 MC, \$140 NM

FMI + Bookings:

[www.nswwriterscentre.org.au/html/s13_shopping/view_product.asp?](http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au/html/s13_shopping/view_product.asp?keyword=opportunitiesofromancefiction)

[keyword=opportunitiesofromancefiction](http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au/html/s13_shopping/view_product.asp?keyword=opportunitiesofromancefiction)

on

OR (02) 9555 9757

@ Wednesday March 24

The Assessor, the Mentor and the Editor ~

Sydney Smith, Michael Nolan & Melanie Dankel

When: 6:30pm - 8:00pm

Where: Victorian Writers' Centre

Cost: \$12 M, \$10 MC, 15 NM

FMI + Bookings: [http://www.vwc.org.au/](http://www.vwc.org.au/what-s-on/event/the-assessor-the-mentor-and-the-editor/)

[what-s-on/event/the-assessor-the-mentor-and-the-editor/](http://www.vwc.org.au/what-s-on/event/the-assessor-the-mentor-and-the-editor/)

OR (03) 9094 7855

@ Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 March

First to Final Draft Masterclass ~ Shelley Kenigsberg and Selena Hanet-Hutchins

When: 10:00am--4:00pm

Where: Byron Community & Cultural Centre

Cost per day: \$115 M \$145 NM

FMI + Bookings: Essential: (02) 6685

5115 or e-mail susie@nrwc.org.au

OR www.nrwc.org.au/v1/index.php

@ Sunday March 28

Motivated Action, Motivated Characters ~ Adair Jones

When: 10:00am--4:30pm

Where: Queensland Writers' Centre

Cost: \$110 M, \$100 MC, \$160 NM

FMI + Bookings:

[www.qwc.asn.au/ProgramsProjects/BrisbaneProgram/Worksho](http://www.qwc.asn.au/ProgramsProjects/BrisbaneProgram/Workshops.aspx#motivated)

[ps.aspx#motivated](http://www.qwc.asn.au/ProgramsProjects/BrisbaneProgram/Workshops.aspx#motivated)

OR (07) 3839 1243

Online Events

Julie Rowe, 2006

Golden Heart

double finalist,

moderates the

Announce Online

Writing Classes list.

The Announce Online

Writing Classes list notifies

subscribers of around 25 to 35

workshops available each month.

Most tutorials are sponsored by

Romance Writers of America, but

on occasion other reputable

teachers are handpicked too.

Interested?

Subscribe sending an e-mail to

[Announceonlinewritingclasses-](mailto:Announceonlinewritingclasses-subscribe@yahoo.com)

[subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:Announceonlinewritingclasses-subscribe@yahoo.com)



BIAW/Monday Challenge Report

February BIAW

Here are the stats: 9 registered participants, 2 withdrawals.

Total goal = 60,330 words,

Achieved = 62,464 words, 6

achieved or passed their goal,

one was very close and the

other two had life get in the way

but wrote anyway – an

admirable achievement. A

great effort by all!

Monday Challenge

At time of writing only one MC

had happened. 6 registered

participants, 1 unable to

participate, Words achieved =

13,139, 4 out of the 5 who took

part achieved 2000 words or

greater.

Well done,

ladies!

2009 Achievers' Awards

Small awards have been won by:

Cath Evans for consistency and

achievement in the Monday

Challenge for 2009 participating

in 26 of 36 challenges,

achieving the 2000+ words on

15 of those occasions.

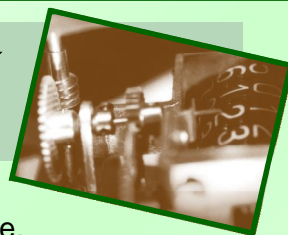
Celia Ravesi participated in 8 of

the 9 BIAWs in 2009 and

achieved her goal every time.

Congratulations, ladies!

Pam Collings



CONTEST UPDATES

Our Next Contest is the Valerie Parv Award

Last year's Valerie Parv Award winner, Kylie Short, has offered some encouragement - It's that time of year again - to enter or not to enter the Valerie Parv Award. Be brave, go for it! What do you gain? Why the chance to mentor with a published author! Forget prize money or fancy rosettes - a whole twelve months of working with one of the most giving, knowledgeable, experienced Australian romance authors in the industry!!! How could you knock back the chance to ask Valerie screeds of questions about the publishing industry, or about working with agents or editors? Maybe you need to

Closing Dates

2010 Contest Closing Dates
26 Mar – Valerie Parv Award

RvBY & First Kiss

Both contests are now closed. Entries are winging their way to judges.



Little Gems

Entries are with judges. The results may be known later this month. Keep an eye on the website and other RWA news venues for the announcement.

work with her on one of your manuscripts? Or talk to her about writing skills - your strengths, your weaknesses? Or ask for advice on "how to..."? The possibilities of mentoring are as endless as your needs and Valerie's willingness to help you in any way she can. There's only one down side to all this - the year goes too quickly! But you can bet you'll be a better writer by the end of it!

Contests!

RESULTS

Congratulations to the following entrants who go to Round 2 of the Emerald

Round 1 Top Scorers

Category	Single Title
Rachael Blair	Vanessa Barneveld
Jennie Brumley	Elizabeth Beckett
Dorothy Fisher	Michelle de Rooy
Bernice Greenham	Robyn Enlund
Sandii Manning	Tamara Jones-Philps
Michelle de Rooy	Clare Jude
Joanne Robertson	Leisl Leighton
Rebecca Sampson	Jennifer McLeod
Deborah Shattock	Ruth Nichols
Jennifer St George	Susanna Rogers
Bronwyn Stuart	Rebecca Skrabl
Rachael Thomas	Nicole Strickland
Tracey Turner	Pam Swain
Chris Weston	Suzanne Webb
Coleen Yan	Allison Withers

All entrants now submit their full manuscript, which is judged for Round 2. Good luck!

A BIG thank you to Bev Lewis and Deb Cox for their Contest Management efforts to date. Stay tuned for the finalists in each section.



Looking for more Contests to enter?



The Romance Writers of New Zealand have their dates on their webpage. Chapter Short Story Contest closes 26th March 2010; HMB Great Beginnings closes 17th April 2010; Strictly

Single closes 17th September 2010. RWNZ's contests will be open to electronic entries from 2010.



Two websites with contest details for Chapters of The Romance Writers of America are

Stephie Smith's site - <http://www.stephiesmith.com/contests.html> and Donna Caubarreux's blog where you can join a yahoo group contest alert. <http://contestdivas.blogspot.com/>



Life After The Big One



So it's March. We're back, thumping our keyboards, dreaming plots, de-sagging our middles, shoving reality out of our head space as we reach for our dreams. Who was it who said: 'You can achieve anything if you try hard enough and don't die first.' Yes, we can. There she'll be, our baby, right up there on the New York Times best seller list. People will be talking about her, hungry for the next. We'll get fanmail from around the world and our turnaround from submission to acceptance will be less than a day... Sorry, personal fantasy coming out now...

My transition to full time author happened slowly. I started when the kids were tiny, writing when they watched Playschool. I sold a book and went back to teaching, writing in the bits of time I could snatch. As my writing took off I dropped to part time teaching, then even more part time, doing it so slowly there was never that amazing point where I woke up one morning and thought okay, I've quit, now I'm a writer.

But for Keri Arthur it happened just like that. Like so many of us she beavered away at her writing while she earned a living elsewhere. Her day job was as a cook at the Essendon Football club.

Keri, how hard was it to find the time to write when you were cooking?

It was horrible! Working at the MCG and then Essendon meant working split shifts, so the only time I really had to write was in the morning before the school and work run (I used to get up an hour or so earlier than I needed to) or late in the evenings after work (and I often didn't get home until midnight). Sometimes I only got half a page done, sometimes I got five or six, but what mattered was that I was writing every single day.

And of course, I wrote a lot of books in that time, including the first three Riley Jenson books.

Can you tell us about your first publication, your subsequent contracts?

My first publication was *Dancing with the Devil*, which was finally accepted by ImaJinn Press way back in 2000. (They rejected it the first time I submitted, but I rewrote to their comments and that did the trick.) Urban Fantasy and paranormal romance hadn't hit the big time back then, and after getting a ton of rejections, I thought I'd try ImaJinn. They were new, they were trade and e-press. I was aware of the risks, but at the time, there was little choice. The major e-presses we know today weren't around back then and mainstream press just wasn't interested in what I was producing.

Of course, being a small press meant ImaJinn had limited distribution, and if readers can't get your books in stores, then your sales won't be fantastic. I made good money for a small press/e-press au-

thor (I still do) but it was never enough to live on, though it did buy stuff for the house that we wouldn't have got otherwise.

And then what changed?

What changed was me getting the idea for the Riley Jenson series. By that time, urban fantasy had really taken off. I knew as soon as I started that Riley was the one that could break me out. It had a 'bigger' feel about it. So I wrote the first two books and started shopping around for agents. Several agents took the fulls. One even helped me rewrite the start to make it sharper, but in the end, all of them said they didn't know where it sat in the marketplace and let it pass. Which was disappointing, to say the least.

Then I got a recommendation to Miriam Kriss, of the Irene Goodman agency. I sent a query and a couple of chapters, not expecting much, and was shocked to get an email back in a matter of days saying she wanted to see the full. So I sent that, but still didn't get my hopes up. After all, I'd been down this road before. But Miriam loved the story and took me on as a client—and within weeks had an auction happening between three publishers. For my books! You have no idea the amount of singing and dancing that happened over those few days—the neighbours must have thought we were mad. In the end, Bantam contracted me for three books, and then contracted me for three more before the first one had even come out.

Tell us about resigning. How did it feel? When you walked out of there the last time, did you have butterflies or were you doing cartwheels all the way back to the carpark?

Actually, the choice of resigning was taken out of my hands. The stress of working split shifts and trying to juggle deadlines, rewrites and edits landed me in hospital for 9 days with seriously high blood pressure (as in, why aren't you dead?). Needless to say, the first thing I did when I got out was quit. Being near death can certainly shake your priorities!*

Your career's gone from strength to strength. Can you tell me what have been the highlights? Where did you sit back and think I've made it, I can do this for the rest of my life?

The biggest highlight—aside from the buzz of having three publishers fight for my novels - was hitting the New York Times list for the very first time. That was totally, absolutely amazing. Even though I've hit the list a few times since then, it still seems totally unreal.

But I don't think I'll ever sit back and think I've made it. There's always the worry in the back of my mind that it won't last, that at any minute, the

cards will come crashing down and I'll be back working split shifts.

What's been the biggest hurdle moving from outside work. My loss was the staff room. Did you, too, miss the company?

The company, totally. I love what I do, but I miss being able to chat about everything and anything. To compensate, I go to the gym every weekday, and we have a gym 'coffee club' - basically a bunch of us get together and gossip after our workouts. I also have monthly lunch meeting with a fabulously talent group of Melbourne authors, and I meet every month with my crit buddies (the Lulus - who I couldn't survive without).

What's the biggest joy when you wake up?

Beside waking? (See * in above question.) Being able to set my own schedule. Doing what I want to do, writing when I want to write. Knowing not only that I love what I do, but it's supporting myself, my daughter and our dogs.

Can you give us a rough outline of your working day? How do you find the discipline to keep going?

I usually rise around 6, have breaky, then walk the

dogs for an hour. Then it's off to the gym for the rest of the morning. Writing happens in the afternoon, and on the weekend if I'm behind. I aim for five pages a day—if I get more, it's a bonus.

As for discipline—I have contracts to fulfil. That won't happen if I sit on my butt and do nothing.

All those early books... the ones you wrote and wrote and got peanuts for and just kept on writing for love... tell us where they're at?

Bantam have just purchased the US paperback rights from ImaJinn, so all those early books should be hitting the shelves next year sometime. (Piatkus had already purchased the UK rights.)

What are your plans for the future, Keri? And your hopes?

My main aim is to keep writing, and to keep selling books. Long term, I'd love to hit the top 5 on the NYT list—but if we're speaking real fantasy, I'd love to see a movie made of my books.

Future releases: *Moon Sworn* (the last of the Riley books) May 2010; *Mercy Burns* (book 2, Myth & Magic series) Jan 2011



Market Watch

with Pam Collings

Information on markets is sourced from websites and other publications and reported in good faith. RWA Inc. does not investigate the information hereafter and cannot be held responsible for its accuracy and recommends readers verify names and addresses before submitting.

Ref: RWA members, Cynthia Stirling newsletter, Publishers Lunch newsletter

YA author and agent **Mandy Hubbard** has joined the **D4EO Literary Agency** where she will concentrate on YA and middle-grade fiction.

At **Harlequin**, executive editor of HQN and Luna **Tracy Farrell** has resigned after 25 years with the company. Farrell has been working with **Tara Parsons** to help her transition into her role as her replacement.

Former Harper UK Children's publishing director **Gillie Russell** will join **Aitken Alexander** as an agent, focusing on YA and children's books.

Dorchester Books' **Leah Hultenschmidt** is now Editorial Director. She takes over for Alicia Condon, who moved to Kensington Books.

At Bantam Dell, **Jessica Sebor** has been promoted from Editorial Assistant to Assistant Editor.

If you're submitting to **Avalon Books**, send your submissions to Assistant Editor **Julia Weis**, Avalon Books, 160 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016.

Denise [Deni] Dietz is a new Associate Editor with **Tekno-Books/Five Star**, in charge of first-time mystery & romance authors, incl. first-book writers & published authors new to them.

www.romanceaustralia.com

Books should be a 65k-120k. Deni tries to respond to queries within 2 weeks & submissions within 8—10 weeks. Send queries to:

AssociateEditorTekno@shaw.ca

Spotlight on Ballantine/Bantam Dell from the RWAmerica convention in Washington, DC presented by Senior Editors Shauna Summers and Kate Collins.

Shauna works on romance, commercial women's fiction and general commercial fiction. Kate is in charge of the romance list at Ballantine.

Ballantine/Bantam Dell is an imprint of Random House. Ballantine and Bantam Dell both publish a wide range of romance: contemporary, paranormal, romantic suspense and historical romance. FMI:

www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/

Shauna emphasized that both Ballantine and Bantam Dell are buying right now. They are interested in authors and don't have certain slots to fill or a particular number of books they publish each month.

Kate really likes sexy romantic suspense. She's not a huge fan of Regency historicals or comedy, but she has bought both. YA, fantasy, urban fantasy and steampunk are handled

by other divisions of Random House.

They admitted the current economy has made all publishers pickier. They'll look much harder at new submissions, and they must be able to really justify a desire to purchase a book. The days of editors buying a book simply because they love it are no more. But they continue to buy both new and established authors.

They generally only accept agented manuscripts but will accept unagented queries (hard copy, not email). They warned that agented work gets first look, so it will take longer to hear back if you don't have an agent.

Clarkesworld Magazine (online) buys SF & fantasy stories up to 8k. Pay: 10c/word for first 4k and 5c/word thereafter. Also offer audio versions of some stories. All speculative fiction, from hard sci-fi to fantasy to horror. <http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/submissions/>

Girl's Life publishes fiction for young girls (age 12 and under) up to 3k. Focus on stories told from the point of view of the girl that deal with situations girls can relate to: family stories, school and friends, crushes & cliques. FMI: www.girlslife.com/page/Writers-Guidelines.aspx

The Last Word

with Christina Phillips



Snippets & buzz
from the front lines



Do freebies boost sales?

Are free books from publishers a good thing for authors? Some publishers believe this practice devalues the book but Christine Brashears of Samhain has interesting stats of how such promos have positively impacted her authors. Lauren Dane, for example, sold over 6000 copies of her books in the months of the free giveaways. More details <http://tinyurl.com/ye5mvea>

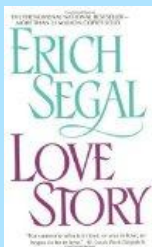


According to an RWAmerica Hot Sheet, RWAmerica has changed the way that it will recognize publishers and authors and will no longer designate publishers as "RWA Eligible." Instead, they'll have a conference allocation system to identify "Qualifying Markets," which must be a non-vanity/non-subsidy publisher or a non-vanity/non-subsidy division, imprint or line of a publisher. This new process of evaluation will likely increase opportunities for small presses and e-presses that previously have been excluded.

More details from Dear Author <http://tinyurl.com/ydwjt7s>

Erich Segal, 72, author of *Love Story*, died of a heart attack at his home in London in January. He had battled Parkinson's Disease for 25 years.

The Washington Post <http://tinyurl.com/ydkw75g>



In retaliation for an eBook pricing debate, in February Amazon removed the buy direct from Amazon button from many Macmillan books. In response, Macmillan took out a full-page *NY Times* advertisement with a bold phrase at the bottom: "Available at booksellers everywhere except Amazon". Agent Nathan Bransford has a comprehensive round-up via links. <http://tinyurl.com/yflevtg>

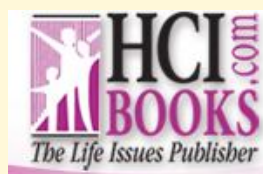


Who moved my buy button?

In response to Amazon's latest tactics, the Author's Guild has set up a website where authors can notify them if the Buy button for their books on Amazon are removed. Apparently Amazon has a history of selectively removing only a portion of a publisher's list from its online market. FMI & links: Galley Cat <http://tinyurl.com/yld5kv>

HCI Books announced the new Vows imprint, publishing what they call a brand new "subgenre" of romantic literature--reality-based romance, or "RB Romance." Matching romance writers with real life couples and turning the wedding column into steamy non-fiction, Julie Leto will write the first book.

More details at Galley Cat <http://tinyurl.com/ybj7yuk>



hi to ipod's big sister

After weeks of rumour and speculation Apple unveiled its iPad on 27th January. You can page through websites, write emails, flick through photos and watch a movie on the big Multi-Touch screen, but it probably won't be available in Australia until later in the year. More details: <http://www.apple.com/ipad/>



The \$110k Australia-Asia Literary Award, launched in 2008 as the biggest prize in the region, was recently scrapped by the WA govt as a waste of money. Funding will now be transferred to the WA Premier's Book Awards, increasing that prize's top winnings to \$40k and bringing it in line with other significant Australian state awards. Yahoo! News <http://tinyurl.com/y889qc3>

Rudd writes a kerfuffle

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has penned a children's book in collaboration with actor Rhys Muldoon, called *Jasper and Abbey and the Great Australia Day Kerfuffle*. It tells the story of the PM's dog and cat. All proceeds will go to charity. Source: The Sydney Morning Herald <http://tinyurl.com/y9x67fo>



avatar rules

James Cameron's 3-D epic *Avatar* has now passed the \$2 billion worldwide box-office record, beating the \$1.8 billion made by *Titanic*. However, Russian



sci-fi fans are miffed with the movie's similarities to the best-selling *Noon Universe* books by brothers Boris and Arkady Strugatsky which were first published in the 1960s. Cameron vehemently rejects the claims, pointing out that he's been planning *Avatar* since at least 1996. *The Independent* <http://tinyurl.com/ycj9u34>



Macmillan president Brian Napack addressed Digital Book World recently on the topic of piracy. He revealed that most of the pirated content they found online comes from pre-publication versions of their books and, like other houses, they're developing strict handling standards to protect content in-house. Napack said they are "optimistic" that piracy can be curbed. Source: Publishers Lunch



**BE ONE WITH STORY.
BE ONE WITH CHARACTER.
OK, I'M READY.**