

# The Love Knot

Newsletter of the Ottawa Romance Writers' Association



**JUNE 2011**

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## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

### **QUOTE OF THE MONTH**

*“What is there to say about June, the time of perfect young summer, the fulfillment of the promise of the earlier months, and with as yet no sign to remind one that its fresh young beauty will ever fade.”*

*- Gertrude Jekyll*

June, the perfect month! Gertrude Jekyll, one of England's great gardeners couldn't have said it better. After months of enduring a Canadian winter, there is nothing more rewarding for me than working in the garden and then sitting with a cool glass of wine and watching nature burst into bloom. As I weed and dig and plant, I find new ideas drifting through my mind, plots, scenes and snatches of dialogue, heroes and villains, conflict and happy endings! All around me the garden's inhabitants are courting, building, foraging, defending and procreating. And then there's that darned rabbit....!

### **REPORT ON OUR MAY MEETING**

Our membership stands at 40. The new on-line application form is now activated and hopefully will make it easier for those thinking of joining ORWA to sign up. We have a healthy bank balance of \$6,525 with \$110 in the Perseverance fund. The workshop schedule for 2011 is now complete and I am happy to report that we will end the year with a balance of approximately \$900 in the workshop budget.

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (continued)**

After a good discussion, it was agreed among members that self-published authors can be listed on ORWA's author page on the web, but that a committee should be formed to review the criteria to qualify for the Jo Beverley First Book Award.

A secret ballot was conducted for the Audrey Jessup Award and Brenda Hammond posted a notice on the chat loop requesting members unable to attend the meeting and vote in person, to send her a private email with their vote. The Audrey Jessup award and all the other awards will be presented at the Social on June 12.

Members agreed that a registration fee of \$10 for members and \$30 for non members would be charged for the Sabrina Jeffries all-day workshop in September. Ideas for promotion were discussed which included creating a "poster" which members could use and forward via email and/or Facebook to help promote the event.

### **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

Self publishing and its implications need serious consideration. I will be asking for a volunteer to set up a committee to review this issue and make recommendations.

The Sabrina Jeffries workshop in September is an opportunity for us to raise some funds to augment our future workshop schedules. Planning the arrangements, promotion etc. for this event will be commencing very soon. To make a success of this event we will need your ideas, suggestions and that most valuable of commodities – your time!

The Social is next Sunday, June 12 (rain date June 19) at Cynthia Boyko's family cottage in Chelsea, Quebec. Check her messages on the loop for information on where, when and what you can contribute. We will not be conducting any business (thank heavens!) so please come and enjoy the opportunity to relax, socialize and support our award winners.

Hope to see you there.

Malena Abel

President

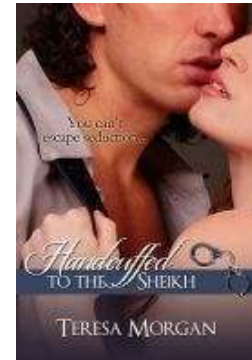
*"If a June night could talk it would probably boast it invented Romance."  
Bern Williams*

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## Current Releases

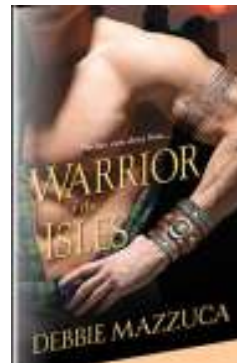
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**MAGGIE JAGGER**  
**VAMPIRE MORGUE**  
May 2011



**TERESA MORGAN**  
**HANDCUFFED TO THE SHEIKH**  
May 2011

**DEBBIE MAZZUCA**  
**WARRIOR OF THE ISLES**  
Kensington Books  
May 2011



**TERESA MORGAN**  
**CINDERELLA AND THE SHEIKH**  
May 2011

**OPAL CAREW**  
**TOTAL ABANDON**  
St. Martin's Griffin  
April 2011



**OPAL CAREW**  
**THE KING AND I**  
Samhain  
April 2011

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## Upcoming Releases

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**LINDA POITEVIN**  
**SINS OF THE ANGELS**  
Ace Books  
October 2011

**DEBBIE MAZZUCA**  
**KING OF THE ISLES**  
Kensington Books  
January 2012

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## Upcoming Workshops

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### June 12 - Social

This year's event will be held in Chelsea, QC. Come out to enjoy some fun in the sun and celebrate the many successes of our members, as well as pay tribute to the hardy souls who have volunteered their time to ORWA. This is a members only event. Information has been posted to ORWA's chat loop.



#### *Getting Past the Hook* with Molly O'Keefe

Readers still love them. Editors still want them. This highly interactive workshop will break down the appeal of the classic plot lines and characters that romance readers crave and we'll discover ways a smart writer can use classic hooks to create unexpected and unforgettable stories.

Multi-published Toronto author [Molly O'Keefe](#)'s first Harlequin romance was published when she was 25 and she hasn't looked back since. *Ditching It Out*, her last Harlequin Flipside won the Romantic Times Reviewers Choice Award in 2005. *Baby Makes Three* won the Romantic Times Reviewers Choice for best SuperRomance in 2006 and her novella *The Christmas Eve Promise* in *The Night Before Christmas* was nominated for a RITA in 2009.



#### *If the Self-pub Shoe Fits...* with Teresa Morgan

Digital self-publishing exploded in 2011 with news of the success of authors like J.A. Konrath, Amanda Hocking, and E.V. Mitchell (Julianne Maclean). Self-publishing for the Kindle, Nook, Sony eReader, iPad and other digital devices, is easy... and complicated. It has big advantages and deep pitfalls. In this workshop, you'll learn more about this intriguing new option for authors and get the info you need to help you decide if self-publishing is right for you.

Topics covered include: The math: Why self-pubbing works

The technology: How self-pubbing happens

\* The business: What you should know before you take that step

\* The advantages: Why you might want to do it

\* The problems: What scary things to avoid

Thinking about dipping your toe into the wide ocean of digital self-publishing? Bring your questions, and let's talk about this new opportunity.

[Teresa Morgan](#) is the self-published author of *Cinderella and the Sheikh* and *Handcuffed to the Sheikh*, steamy contemporary romances available now on Amazon.

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## Articles

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# Interview with Jenny Bullough, Manager Digital Content, Harlequin

by Cristal Ryder

*The following article originally appeared in the April (Q2) edition of the Passionate Ink newsletter. Cassandra Carr, Editor.*

I had the pleasure of interviewing Jenny Bullough, Manager Digital Content with Harlequin. I've known Jenny for 10 years now and first met when the Harlequin Writing Round Robin was the place to be and a terrific opportunity to test your writing skills.

**Q. Can you believe its 10 years? I can't. And look how much everything has changed.**

A. I know! It's crazy isn't it? I feel lucky to have worked in publishing during such an exciting decade – with more changes on the horizon! (Though it does make me feel a \*little\* old when I think about how much has changed... When I was in University the Facebook was an actual stapled "book" of all the students' names, photos, and phone numbers!)

**Q. How long has Harlequin been lucky to have you with them?**

A. I've been lucky to be with Harlequin just over 10 years. Working on the WRR was one of my first jobs!

**Q. Looking back at the WRR and the beginnings of eHarlequin, what sticks out in your mind most about those fledgling years?**

A. What sticks out in my mind is how tough it was to be working on something that we instinctively knew was the future, but word hadn't gotten around quite yet. At the time, the Internet bubble had just burst and many start-ups were going out of business. Luckily the powers that be at Harlequin saw the value in continuing to build a destination for romance readers online, and it turned out that we were ahead of the curve in the development of digital!

**Q. Have you always been 'geeky' or did you find your career took a surprising turn? You do belong to a girl geek club right?**

A. Right! I co-founded the Toronto Girl Geek Dinners with a friend, Maggie Fox – a series of informal get-togethers for women working in technology and digital media. I have to admit, I have always had a "geeky" bent; this next statement will date me irrevocably, but I was in University when I first heard about this new thing called the "internet" and how it allowed you to chat with other people all over the world, and I knew I had to find out more. My career did take a turn though – my first job in publishing was for a textbook publisher and was very print-based. Authors submitted their manuscripts on reams of paper; we edited on paper and then submitted the marked-up copy to typesetting to be input... It was a different world! When I joined Harlequin's

internet team 10 years ago I didn't know HTML from a hole in the ground – but I was interested and I'm a quick learner!

***Q. Was there a turning point that made Harlequin take a good hard look at the digital world and where they wanted to be in it?***

A. That's a tough one to answer because the digital world is always changing! One recent turning point was the release of the first affordable ereading devices in 2007. Once ereading became affordable for mainstream readers, we realized we wanted to make sure ALL our books are in ebook formats, so readers could buy them anywhere, anytime.

***Q. I just saw an announcement on Carina site. Why have they stopped pdf version of ebooks?***

A. We stopped making pdf and other formats because ePub, the industry standard format, is more adaptable and readable on all devices (including your computer using Adobe Digital Editions). PDF format is not as compatible across devices, and we want to make sure the needs of all our readers are being met, no matter which device she chooses to use.

***Q. Will the monthly Harlequin reader service program offer an e-version instead of sending the paperbacks?***

A. Actually, we're currently offering ebook subscriptions for many of our series, including Harlequin Presents, Harlequin Blaze, Silhouette Desire, and more!

***Q. Is Harlequin itself - not Carina Press - planning to do digital-only books?***

A. Many people don't realize it, but Harlequin has been doing digital-only ebook shorts since 2007, starting with Spice Briefs and expanding to Nocturne Bites and Historical Undone. As for longer digital-only books – who knows?

***Q. You rub shoulders with some amazing people in the industry, is there anyone in particular that you are star struck by?***

A. Ooh, good question! There are definitely some thought leaders in digital production that I follow on Twitter to learn as much as I can. And I completely geeked out recently at the Tools of Change conference when I got to meet many of my idols in person! As for being star-struck though – undoubtedly, unquestionably I am star-struck by the authors. I admire not just the inspiration and creativity that drives them to create stories, but the immense dedication and perseverance that is required to follow through on that vision and actually write a book! And when I get a chance to meet them at conferences like RWA, they're always so warm, sweet and nice! Meeting authors is definitely a big part of what makes working in romance publishing so rewarding.

***Q. I understand you having spreadsheets for your spreadsheets? That's organization! How does Harlequin/Carina keep track of all the submission through the process of receipt to accept/reject?***

A. Spreadsheets for my spreadsheets! Ha ha! That's Angela James' little joke. <http://carinapress.com/blog/2011/02/introducing-jenny-bullough/> I'm not actually THAT hyper-organized (I wish I was!). Luckily I don't need to be –

Harlequin has a very efficient and easy to use database that all imprints (including Carina) and editorial offices use to log every submission and track its progress through readings, edits, production, and publication – or rejection, or revision.

***Q. You are on the acquisitions team for Carina, can you give us an idea of process ?***

A. I could try, but you'd be better served reading this blog post from Carina Press.com that explains it all: <http://carinapress.com/blog/2010/10/how-do-acquisitions-work/One> aspect of the process that I really appreciate is the fact that we work as a team; if one of us doesn't like a submission because it's not to our taste, we pass it along to another reader. There have been a few submissions that the first reader disliked but the second reader loved, that have gone on to be acquired!

***Q. Is there something specific you look for in a submission? Any little tips you can offer?***

A. Just a good story, well told with engaging characters and a well-paced plot and believable dialogue; you know, the basics! There really are no tips. Although speaking purely personally, I'm partial to stories that throw you right into the action without a lot of preamble or setup. It's tricky to execute, but as a reader, it always grabs me right away!

***Q. We're a group of erotica writers. What tips can you give Passionate Ink members for submitting to Harlequin/Carina's more spicier lines?***

A. Just don't be afraid to explore all the varieties of kinks that are out there! Especially for Spice and Carina Press, almost anything goes when it comes to erotica! But that said, character is still important. The best erotica, in my humble opinion, has a believable conflict and relatable characters as well as plenty of steamy, toe-curling, need-a-cold-shower-after-reading sex.

***Q. You must have been swamped with submissions from So You Think You Can Write, can you share how many requests were sent out and can we look forward to a similar event this year?***

A. We were overjoyed to get hundreds of submissions through SYTYCW and we are definitely planning another event this year! We have lots in store – for updates stay tuned to the Harlequin blog ([www.harlequinblog.com](http://www.harlequinblog.com))!

***Q. Can you tell us a little bit about the social media training webinars you do for your authors ?***

A. Sure! We know that the world of social media can be daunting for beginners, and we want to equip our authors with as many tools as possible for connecting with readers while promoting themselves and their books. To do this, we offer an ongoing program of one-hour live webinars covering the basics and more advanced usage of Twitter, Facebook, blogs, websites, and more! I really enjoy giving the webinars, sharing what we on the digital team have learned through trial and error in using these platforms. My one pet peeve is that it seems like every time we have a webinar scheduled, Twitter and Facebook decide to make a few little updates and "improvements" that force us to update our slide decks at the last minute!

**Q. What is your favourite genre to read?**

A. I read all kinds of genres as part of my work with the Carina Press acquisitions team, but truthfully, my first love will always be anything historical. Any era or setting – regency, Roman, ancient China, medieval... even steampunk, which is a kind of re-imagined Victorian era with advanced although steam-based technology. I love the feeling of being transported to a different place and time!

**Q. You have a way with words, have you ever thought of writing?**

A. Thanks! But no, I'm not a writer. I'm just lucky enough to get to work with writers from time to time!

*Amanda Racette Twentyfive writing as Cassandra Carr Talk to Me, out now from Loose Id! Uniform Behaviour, out now from Andrews UK!*

*Writer website:* <http://www.booksbycassandracarr.com>

*Facebook:* <http://www.facebook.com/AuthorCassandraCarr>

*Twitter:* [http://www.twitter.com/cassandra\\_carr](http://www.twitter.com/cassandra_carr)

*Goodreads:* <http://www.goodreads.com/CassandraCarr>

*Amazon:* <http://www.amazon.com/Cassandra-Carr>



# How to Win Writing Contests

by Clarissa Southwick

*The following article appeared in the June edition of Heart of Romance, the newsletter of the Coeur de Bois Chapter (CBC-RWA) in Boise, Idaho. This article first appeared at [www.gemstatewriters.com](http://www.gemstatewriters.com).*

"This is the worst contest entry I've ever read, and I've been judging for twenty years."

Ouch. It doesn't sound like that author is going to win any writing contests, does it?

That's a direct quote from the score sheet of the first writing contest I ever entered. Yet, somehow I've managed to place in more chapter contests than I can count and final in the Golden Heart with two different manuscripts. Along the way, I've learned a thing or two about writing contests. Before I give you the secrets to winning writing contests, I must post some disclaimers:

I'm not writing about anyone in particular here. Everything in this blog is based on patterns I've observed when interacting with large groups of writers. Your personal experience may differ.

A single writing contest means nothing. No one wins every contest entered. There's always the chance you'll get the crazy judge, and you can't do anything about crazy. Here, I'm talking about gradually progressing over a period of time until you can regularly advance to the final round and get your manuscripts in front of editors and agents.

Here's what you need to know to win writing contests:

**Attitude is Everything.** Believe it or not, your attitude shows in your manuscript. It shows in how you string words together. It shows in your characters. It shows in how you respond to contest feedback.

**Stop Showing Off.** If you think you're some kind of writing genius and your brilliance far exceeds the intellect of stupid contest judges, you will get low scores. Judges get tired of being yanked out of the story with cutesy one-liners and complicated prose. Nobody cares if you wrote your entry in iambic pentameter. They just want to be caught up in a good story.

**Choose your Contest Carefully.** Be sure the contest has the correct category for your work. Don't try to squeeze your novel into a romance category if it's not a romance. Look for contests that throw out the lowest score so you don't fall victim to the whims of a single judge.

**Read the score sheet and the rules BEFORE the contest:** This sounds obvious, but I'm frequently approached by outraged authors whose low scores were perfectly predictable. If the score sheet lists required elements and you do not include them, the judge cannot give you a high score, no matter how much she loves your story.

**Read the score sheet AFTER the contest:** Look at the numbers. If you consistently score low on the same elements, you need to stop entering

contests and take a class on that topic. Hone your craft and the rest will fall into place.

**Get all the Easy Points:** You should always get a perfect score on the "Mechanics" section. Submitting an entry that is full of spelling and grammar errors shows contempt for the judges. Don't be surprised if their comments reflect that same insulting attitude back onto your manuscript.

**Show you Know the Rules Before You Break Them:** When used sparingly, fragments and odd punctuation can be used to great effect. Just be sure it's obvious that's what you're doing. You're not Jack Kerouac, and *On the Road* wasn't his first novel.

**Stop Making Excuses:** Authors tend to come up with explanations for why they can't get ahead. "Judges don't like stories written in first person." "Judges don't like strong heroines." "Contests only reward mediocre writing." Yet, I've seen winning entries disprove all of these theories. Don't let myths keep you from hearing what the judges are actually saying.

**Listen. Really. Listen.** There is only one difference between those who succeed at contests and those who don't. The winners have learned how to set aside their emotions and use the judge's feedback properly. Sometimes it's hard to get past the snarky comments to the lesson hidden underneath, but you have to do it if you want to learn anything from the experience.

**Know when to polish, and when to start over:** If your scores are typically lower than 60% of the total possible, you probably want to start over. But if you regularly score in the 80% range, you only need to polish. Don't throw out the first chapter and rewrite it just because you didn't final. If you do, you will always be submitting a first draft and your chances for success will plummet.

**Don't enter before you're ready:** Twice I've entered contests on a whim, typing up the final pages minutes before the deadline. Both times, I thought I was just entering to get feedback on an idea. Both times, I ended up in the finals, embarrassed to have a first draft in front of a final editor. Don't do it. Only put your polished work out there. Trust me on this.

**Volunteer to Judge:** It's the easiest way to learn how judges think. You'll see your own writing differently once you've seen other writers making the same mistakes.

**Lose the Anger.** Angry, bitter writers tend to write angry, bitter characters. No one enjoys spending time with a hateful heroine. If you're miserable because you've failed to succeed in the harsh world of publishing, take a year off and rediscover the joy of writing.

Attitude is everything. No, that repetition is not an error.

Love writing, love what you write, and the judges will love it too.

*Two time Golden Heart finalist, Clarissa Southwick writes tales of adventure where cultures and hearts collide. Clarissa Southwick 2010 & 2011 Golden Heart Finalist*  
[www.gemstatewriters.com](http://www.gemstatewriters.com) ●●●

## GOODREADS - Good Resource!

by Alyssa Goodnight

*The following article first appeared in the May 2011 issue of In Print!, the monthly newsletter of Houston Bay Area RWA. Leslie Marshman, Editor.*

It seems like I'm late to the game for every sort of social media outlet, probably because I have the 'never gonna happen' mentality. First it was Facebook, then Twitter, and now I've succumbed to Goodreads. When I joined I wasn't too optimistic; mostly I was just doing it because I saw that other authors were doing it, and I figured it couldn't hurt. I didn't expect that I'd be all that interested in organizing any virtual bookshelves or reading some random reviews, but honestly, I'm intrigued!

Goodreads was created to give readers a more personalized way of discovering new books that fit their tastes and interest. The idea is that you'll friend readers whose tastes are similar to yours and whose reviews you trust, and then use the site to keep track of those books. (I'd previously been doing that with an Amazon wishlist.)

When I signed up, I decided, at least for the time being, not to play catch-up, so the only books on my bookshelves are books I've added to my TBR stack this year or books I've read this year. For each of those I've already finished, I've posted a mini-review and a couple of favorite quotes from the book. Each time I add a book, or write a review, all my friends (and fans) get notified. It's like a little connection between us - a little, "Hey, have you heard about this book??" Goodreads also offers the capability to link to your Facebook and Twitter accounts, so you can talk books everywhere you go. Virtually speaking.

The fact that I've authored a book that exists in the Goodreads database (which is linked to the Amazon database), has allowed me to create an 'author page.' The how-to's can be found at [http://www.goodreads.com/author/how\\_to](http://www.goodreads.com/author/how_to). I've already synced my blog to my Goodreads author page so that now I'm communicating with my Goodreads friends 'beyond the books,' sharing author news or just random interesting stuff. Another connection.

When it gets closer to my release day, I can host a giveaway through Goodreads, offering one or more copies of an ARC or finished book. Being listed on the Goodreads giveaway page will get my book lots of visibility, and with any luck, encourage those readers who do not win a copy to go out and buy one - and then review it (favorably!) on Goodreads. If these



readers/reviewers have their Goodreads accounts linked to Facebook and Twitter, then those reviews show up there too, and suddenly it's viral.

**Alyssa Goodnight**

Goodreads author profile

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>url</b>          | <a href="http://www.goodreads.com/alyssagoodnight">http://www.goodreads.com/alyssagoodnight</a> |
| <b>gender</b>       | female  |
| <b>member since</b> | March 2011  |

**about this author**[edit data](#)

Alyssa Goodnight is the author of *AUSTEN-TATIOUS*, the story of a girl, a journal, and the incorrigible Jane Austen, to be published by Kensington Books in February 2012. Keep up with her on her blog at [alyssagoodnight.com](http://alyssagoodnight.com)

Goodreads lets you host author chats, post quizzes, purchase targeted pay-as-it's-clicked ad space, and post giveaways to foreign countries, which can garner you some new readers in other parts of the world-and perhaps even trigger some foreign sales. You can also post content (ebooks or excerpts) and even view your author stats, which keep track of how many people are adding, rating, and reviewing your books. For a book-loving author (aren't we all?), it's like one-stop shopping!

*Alyssa Goodnight is the author of *AUSTEN-TATIOUS*, the story of a girl, a journal, and the incorrigible Jane Austen, to be published by Kensington Books in February 2012. Keep up with her on her blog at [www.alyssagoodnight.blogspot.com](http://www.alyssagoodnight.blogspot.com), 'friend' her at [www.facebook.com/AlyssaGoodnight](http://www.facebook.com/AlyssaGoodnight), follow her at [www.twitter.com/a\\_goodnight](http://www.twitter.com/a_goodnight) and friend or fan her at [www.goodreads.com/alyssagoodnight](http://www.goodreads.com/alyssagoodnight)*



## Suzanne Brockmann: Write The Best Book You Can

by Marilyn Baron

*The following article first appeared in the May/June 2011 issue of The Galley, the newsletter of the Georgia Romance Writers chapter. Marilyn Baron, Editor.*

New York Times bestselling author Suzanne Brockmann's *Breaking the Rules* is her 50th book, which came out in the same year she turned 50.

"The business (of writing) is filled with obstacles and challenges, regardless of where we are in our careers," said Brockmann at the March 26 meeting of Georgia Romance Writers (GRW). "One of the things I've heard is that all writers are crazy. It's one of the few careers that allow you to take advantage of your next illness.

"The writing process for some books is the equivalent of hitting ourselves in the head with a sledgehammer over and over and over," said the author, who is now widely recognized as one of the leading voices in romantic suspense. "Being a romance author is not unlike being a Navy Seal. The only easy day was yesterday.

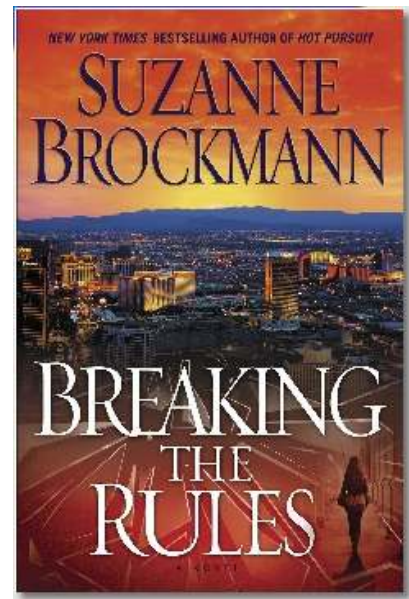
"When you make your first sale, your problems are just beginning," Brockmann pointed out, listing the many things that can get a writer down, like rejection letters, bad reviews, snarly comments, nasty e-mails and bad critiques. But she advises writers to be happy on the journey and urges, "Don't give up. I can't give up. I won't give up."

When Brockmann became aware of her passion, she realized "this is what I want to feel all the time. This is why we write, because there are stories we need to tell. My books have themes and messages and social commentary. Writers write because there's a lot of noise in their heads." Brockmann said one of the things that sets us apart is this burning need to write.

"There are side effects," cautioned Brockmann. "You've got to be able to reach a place you can protect yourself, keep your inner writer safe." Brockmann challenged the audience to:

- Reach Higher
- Raise your personal bar
- Truly fall in love with your amazing and diverse characters and
- Always give your story the best it deserves.

She said that some books are so wonderfully well written that stories and characters will follow you around for years.



"Ongoing story arcs fascinate me," Brockmann said. "My brain is wired to plan for them and set things up. Being in that world with the same characters, you have to love it."

Brockmann plans and plots seven books in advance and says that works out well for her as a writer. An outliner, versus a seat-of-the-pants writer, Brockmann does her planning (story notes, characters notes, backstory) plotting and outlines at the beginning.

"It works for me to know where I am going. I am able to set things up in advance. That's the way my mind works."

### Deep POV

In a talk that ranged from how to write Deep POV (Point of View) to digital publishing, Brockmann kept the audience riveted. "POV is one of the tools in a writer's toolbox we use to tell a story and let the reader know who is telling the story."

The varying levels of POV include:

Subjective, personal first person Deep Point of View allows you to come into the character's head and tell a story through somebody's perspective. Paying attention to who your character is and giving the reader an insight into who they are makes it personal.

Objective POV, is like having a security camera watching the action. It's more impersonal and reflects what happens, not what a character is feeling or thinking. Brockmann has a link on her Web site to a 56-page booklet called "Going Deep with POV" that explains why Deep POV works, words to use, and how to communicate with the reader that we're still deeply in someone's head throughout the course of the scene.

### Digital Publishing

"Digital publishing is coming at us," noted Brockmann, who acknowledged that for the first time, her digital e-book sales are higher than her print sales. "This is the future and the future is here. Publishers have been resisting this but I believe it is a huge opportunity. The industry is changing and we should approach it with excitement."

Brockmann is an admitted print lover (she loves the smell of books) and says it's cool to have her own book on a bookstore shelf. "I'm a bookstore lover, but it's a matter of being aware of and preparing for the future, taking advantage of reader contact. We reach a wide audience and we can create places for our readers to gather so we can all celebrate these books together."

When asked if you could be a successful author and still not be happy, Brockmann spoke to what she's learned about success and expectations.

"Certain people will never be satisfied. A lot of people struggle with success no matter where their careers are. They could make \$17 billion and it would still not be enough. There are life issues for everybody that play into it."

Brockmann cited Mexican Author Don Miguel Ruiz's *The Four Agreements* as a way to avoid creating limitations and unhappiness in our lives. The Four

Agreements are: -Be Impeccable With Your Word. -Don't Take Anything Personally. -Don't Make Assumptions. -Always Do Your Best.

Ruiz has subsequently released a sequel, *The Fifth Agreement*, which adds a further agreement:

Be skeptical, but learn to listen.

### More Q&As

**Q: Do characters continue to live with you or distance themselves? Do they stay with you after you've given them a happy ending?**

A: It depends on who the characters are and how badly I made them suffer. Jules Cassidy won't leave me alone. He'll wake me up at night.

**Q: What do romance readers want? Why do they read romance? What are they looking for?**

A: I talk to a lot of romance readers. I want to push readers out of their comfort zone with subplots that don't end neatly paired off. I pay attention to what readers want, why people do the things that they do and what makes them tick and bring in other elements. I know the characters' beliefs and values and about their childhoods. I put them in a situation and let them react naturally.

People appear in my head. I get to know them, know their backstory. Really get to know your characters.

Brockmann uses action/reaction in her book to shake things up. She reveals important information when the characters talk to each other.

"Everyone will react differently," she said. "If your character is a thoughtful man, you'll want to show him being thoughtful. As a writer, create each situation and know what your characters will do."

**Q: Why don't you make your books into movies?**

A: It's hard to translate romance novels into movies because they are filled with introspection and it's hard to translate that introspection and emotion.

Brockmann is married to author Ed Gaffney, who accompanied her to the meeting. The couple spent four months in New York City last spring producing an Off-Broadway play, "Looking for Billy Haines," and they're currently in pre-production for a low budget SAG movie in Sarasota, Florida in June.

Brockmann left the audience with the following advice: "There's always a higher step you can take as a writer. Everybody should strive to grow as a person and a writer. It's been an awesome journey. Write the best book you can."

*Marilyn Baron, a public relations consultant, serves on the board of Georgia Romance Writers (GRW) as editor of The Galley, and is the recipient of the GRW 2009 Chapter Service Award. Her humorous supernatural e-short story, "A Choir of Angels," was released February 2011 from TWB Press at*

*<http://www.twbpress.com/achoirofangels.html> is available on Amazon Kindle, Barnes & Noble Nook and OmniLit. ●●●*

# Character Flaws Are Misunderstood Traits

by Amberly Smith

*The following article appeared in the June edition of Heart of Romance, the newsletter of the Coeur de Bois Chapter (CBC-RWA) in Boise, Idaho.*

## What are Traits?

Able, active, adventurous, affectionate, ambitious, anxious, arrogant, attentive. You get the idea. Character traits are aspects of a person. Like building blocks, they fit together creating the overall personality of your character.

Character traits are all about perspective. The same trait can have a positive and negative side. My best friend's practical side (positive) could be seen as cautious (neutral) or uptight (negative). It is the same character trait, the same habits and actions but the situation and the view will interpret them differently. My dad was stubborn (neutral) but I appreciated his dedication (positive) while I hated his unbendable will (negative). Superman is a perfectionist who looks down on those he sees as being wrong or corrupt and is devastated when he struggles or makes mistakes. Lois Lane is driven to prove herself (neutral) even if that means she takes extreme risks (negative) she'll work hard (positive) until everyone knows what she knows but sometimes doubts- she is just as capable as the next guy.

## Flawed to Perfection

Having flawed characters makes them realistic and relatable. Superman has an aversion to Kryptonite but that's just a weakness, the allergy doesn't make him a flawed character. Lois Lane – we'll stick to that movie reference – has a fear of heights or kumquats (I don't remember which). But that's just a fear. Neither are character flaws. You can watch a whole movie or television episode and not come across either kryptonite or high places but every episode involves their character flaws. Some stories are written with characters that are perfect and have everything they could ever want and conflict only stems from external forces. But the reader won't care about the perfect character let alone the story. They can't relate to someone who is perfect. And it is not the have or not having. An unflawed poor person might draw our sympathy but not hold our interest. Iron Man is wealthy, good looking and super smart. What is his character flaw? People might tell you that his motivation is his dying body. But that isn't his character flaw, what makes him interesting and has us cheer for him is his need for acceptance. He craves it yet is so sure no one can/would accept him that he self sabotages. A bit like Julia Styles' character from 10 Things I Hate About You. Showing her shrew side before people get too close.

### Examples:

Laura Croft, great kick ass character, filthy rich, sexy and no responsibilities. Character flaw? Trust issues. Her cautious nature keeps her alive but alone.

Indiana Jones, adventurer, intelligent, use to following instinct. Not one to pause and consider, plan ahead, his lack of caution gets him into a lot of trouble. Being afraid of snakes is a great plot device but doesn't make him a flawed character.

Bridget Jones, naive, charmingly guileless, too trusting. She thinks the best of people but doesn't take the time to see the inner them or the inner her.

### Showing Character Flaws

Some genres are all about coincidence, fate and nature happening TO your characters. Disaster films and inspirational are two examples. Most genres, however, are steered, created, directed, a result of...choices. Your character makes a choice which affects the story and generates another decision to be made. They make these choices because of the type of character or person they are.

They change as the story progresses, they grow. But only they would process through the story the same way. Put Dorothy in Wonderland and it would be a very different story. Swap the Joneses and Bridget would be trusting the antique smuggler and would be led down the path of death. Though Indiana and Mark Darcy totally works for me.

If it is a one book tale, show all of their character flaws. If it is a series of books, one flaw per book. James Bond doesn't change much between movies/books but he is confident and cocky and competent in all of them. Part of the reason the actors can change and the movies still work, it's the same character in each movie.

### Tools

If your building characters for your story (of course you are) here are some of the things I use and fully recommend taking a look at. You don't have to use all or any of them for each and every book, but becoming familiar with the different methods can make it easier to figure out what your method is. Laura Baker and Robin Perini's *Discovering Story Magic*. Debra Dixon's *GMC*. Myers Briggs Personality Types. Numerology. Chinese Zodiac.

So get in there and build your characters one trait at a time. Use the different sides of each trait (positive, negative) to make choices about what happens next. And next thing you know, your character will be listed among the best in literature. Healthcliff, Darcy, Cruella Deville, Roarke, Bridget Jones, Alyssa Locke, Gandalf, Severus Snape ... oh man, there is just too many. You get the idea. Right?

*Amberly lives in the Northwest with her husband, two children, mother-in-law, and a cat named Cat. She has a bachelor's in communications and likes to read in bed, lurk in bookstores, and cuddle on the couch with her kids to watch TV. Her first book *Rinse and Repeat* was recently released by Dreamspinner Press. Find Amberly on the web at [www.amberlysmith.com](http://www.amberlysmith.com) or on facebook. Clarissa Southwick 2010 & 2011 Golden Heart Finalist [www.gemstatewriters.com](http://www.gemstatewriters.com)*



## If You Want to Break Through, Break Out

by McKenna Darby

*The following article first appeared in the May 2011 issue of The Jasmine Newsletter for the Lowcountry Romance Writers of South Carolina.*

Do your manuscripts win contests and polite praise from editors and agents, but never a contract offer? Are you a published author who sells respectably, but not as profitably as you like?

If so, your key to breaking through just may be to Break Out.

"Writing the Breakout Novel," by New York agent Donald Maass is designed to help novelists at any stage of their career take their fiction to the next level, whether that's getting published for the first time, increasing their sales numbers, or landing on the bestseller lists.

Maass believes that almost any novelist can break out if they're willing "to delve deeper, think harder, revise more, and commit to creating characters and plot that surpass one's previous accomplishments." After attending one of his weekend workshops I believe him.

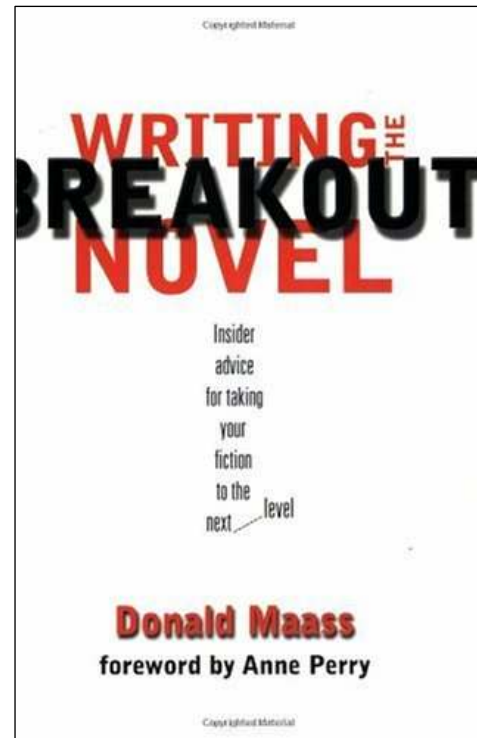
Why? Because I've seen the results of applying his methods to my own work.

### Create tension on every page

Perhaps the most controversial of Maass' tenets is that a novel should have tension on every page. I suspect most writers fight this concept either because they know their work doesn't achieve it or because they misunderstand what Maass means by tension.

He doesn't mean a car chase, a loaded gun, or any other life-or-death situation, although those can certainly contribute tension. Instead he means emotional tension: between what the hero and antagonist want but only one can get; between what the main character wants and what he needs; between what he believes and what he does; between what he thinks and what he says.

To create tension on every page requires deep character understanding. It also requires deep point of view that lets your readers live in your characters' skins so they can understand and accept the authenticity of actions that otherwise might seem illogical or uncharacteristic. It is this deep understanding - this opportunity to experience another's thoughts and feelings vicariously - that gives characters complexity and brings them to life.



In *TRAITOR TO LOVE* my protagonist, Alston Buchanan, has devoted his life to duty and honor, partly in reaction to his father's corruption. To avoid being drawn deeper into his father's schemes Alston takes his only way out, accepting a post as a spy in the newly formed U.S. Secret Service. The resulting conflict between doing his duty - which requires Alston to lie - and acting honorably sets his two defining principles at war. The recurring question of whether Alston will choose duty or honor when his personal crisis reaches its climax contributes to creating tension on every page.

### **Raise the stakes**

Another way to create tension is to constantly raise the stakes. At the weekend seminar, Maass challenged us to raise the stakes and then raise them again. And again. And again and again and again. (And then a few more agains, just for good measure.) After about the fourth "again" my manuscript ran out of steam. I had committed the novelist's most fatal mistake: I'd let my hero off too easy.

Fortunately, I found I'd subconsciously planted the seeds of additional trials throughout my novel. Now that I have cultivated those seeds the story moves faster and the reader cares more. Best of all, the additional tension isn't melodrama. It's what has to happen for the story to be true to the situation I created.

### **Go beyond the obvious emotion**

Most of the manuscripts gathering dust in Maass's slush pile have a common flaw: They fail to dig below the obvious surface emotions. In a frightening scene, the characters feel fear. Cruelty makes them feel compassion. Carnage elicits horror. As Maass points out, writers don't need to explore these inherent emotions. If you've set up the situation properly, your reader feels them as events unfold. By focusing on less obvious emotions, you give the reader a richer, more rewarding experience and create more memorable, believable characters.

In one of my scenes, for example, my heroine has been cheated out of her home and livelihood by the man who murdered her father. She has exhausted every possible avenue to win back what is rightfully hers and has postponed the inevitable as long as she can. As she packs up the few belongings the scoundrel will allow her to take, I wrote her as resigned to her situation.

The scene just laid there. Fortunately, when Maass instructed the workshop participants to turn at random to any page in our manuscripts, mine opened to that scene. What, Maass asked the group, lies beneath the obvious emotion? What lies beneath that? What is buried so deep that you and your character may not even aware of it?

As he continued to ask his questions, I realized my character was angry. No, not angry; livid. She hated the man who was stealing her inheritance. The very idea of that murderer touching anything her father had owned made her physically ill. As I explored these emotions, I discovered that she was picturing herself crouched at an upstairs window with her father's gun, picking off the scoundrel and anyone who dared to join him in trying to force her out of her home.

Rewritten with these insights into her emotional state, the scene now crackles. Though she never acts on her daydream, my rational, reasonable, responsible heroine got an unforgettable opportunity to reveal the side of her that rails against injustice. In the process, she became a more interesting, believable and well-rounded character. I liked her before; I love her now. Better yet, another reason for my honor-loving hero's devotion to her became clearer.

### Purpose-driven revisions

Although I'd already spent months working my way through Maass' excellent "Breakout" workbook, attending his two-day seminar led me to nearly 90 such epiphanies. As I add them to my manuscript, each transformation moves the novel a bit closer to its full potential.

This article outlines just three of the 40 categories and 691 steps included in the "Breakout" workbook. The two-day workshops delve even deeper. It's grueling, exhausting, and thoroughly exhilarating work. My rewrites now have a plan and a purpose. The improvements in my manuscript are striking.

Will the result be a breakthrough novel? Only time will tell. But I have no doubt it is a better novel and that the breakthrough will come. With such a powerful roadmap, it's only a matter of time and determination.

For writing prompts based on "Writing the Breakout Novel" visit <http://www.maassagency.com/thismonth.html>

For a list of "Breakout Novel" workshops and other appearances by Donald Maass, including his upcoming session at the 2011 RWA Nationals, visit <http://www.maassagency.com/appearances.html>

*McKenna Darby writes historical fiction and romantic suspense. Visit her at <http://mckennadarby.blogspot.com> TRAITOR TO LOVE is a finalist in the historical category of the 2011 Daphne du Maurier Award of Excellence for Mystery and Suspense.*



## A Pre-Launch Promo Plan in Review

by Virna DePaul

*The following article first appeared in the Promotion Posse column in the May 2011 issue of Heart of the Bay, the San Francisco RWA. Karin Ohlson, Editor*

I'm smack-dab in the middle of promoting my debut novel, *Chosen By Blood*, which releases on May 3, 2011 by Berkley Sensation. Since I sold the story in November of 2009, I've been figuring out different ways to promote it and myself. Here is what I've learned and the contacts I've made. Has it worked?

I've since sold several books, have a mailing list of over 1,200 subscribers, and have over 500 Facebook fans. This is just a drop in the bucket compared to what other authors have, but I think it's a great start for a debut author. Most importantly, several people came up to me at the recent Romantic Times Convention Book Fair, introduced themselves, and bought early copies of my book because they knew of me from my marketing efforts. Someone from South Africa contacted me to request my trading cards, and I have "readers," most who've been complimentary of my work, some not so much.

In other words, I think I'm on my way to becoming a real writer. No one can predict whether this will actually help my sales in the end, but I can safely say, I've done what I can do to help! Since getting started with marketing is sometimes a difficult thing for writers, I hope this information helps you figure out what's out there and what's possible!

In December 2009, I bought a marketing package, which included one trailer design, social networking assistance, and three author chats (upcoming) with Book Candy Studios.

I had a logo for the Para-Ops team designed by a local graphic artist, made mugs and t-shirts, sent them to my Berkley editor and others.

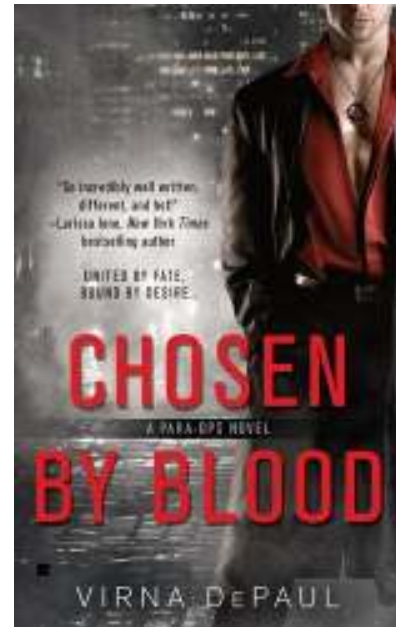
I contacted authors I love and respect (and accepted offers from others I love and respect) and obtained cover quotes for CBB.

In 2010, I served another term as president for Black Diamond RWA.

I have been an author category captain for Brenda Novak's online auction ([www.brendanovak.auctionanything.com](http://www.brendanovak.auctionanything.com)) in support of juvenile diabetes research for years, including 2010 and upcoming. Not only do I get to help a great cause, but this auction is a great way for writers to get their names out to a huge number of readers.

### Workshops

I submitted several workshop proposals for RWA National 2010 in FL and RWA National 2011 in NY.



In July 2010: presented High Concept workshop at National RWA, and another workshop with NYT bestselling author Lori Wilde.

In June 2011, I'll be presenting a workshop at National RWA on Story Structure and Turning Points.

I presented a workshop for BDRWA on High Concept.

I presented a workshop for Sacramento Valley Rose RWA on High Concept.

I presented a workshop for SVRWA on Conflict with author Tawny Weber.

I spoke at the BDRWA February 2011 Retreat.

I taught a Theme and Story Question and Story Structure workshop at SavvyAuthors.com.

### **I've led monthly craft chats on SavvyAuthors.com:**

March 2011 Publishing Industry (this was my first video webinar)

January 2011 - World building

December 2010 - Brainstorming

October 2010 - Synopsis

September 2010 - Ways To Talk About Your Story

August 2010 - Scene & Sequel

July 2010 - Three Act Structure

June 2010 - Conflict

May 2010 - Characters

April 2010 - Theme Conferences/Networking:

I spoke for the Sacramento Press Club with Marketing expert Rebekkah Donaldson.

**I contacted authors about being in their newsletters/book club promos,** including Dianna Love's Book Club, where book clubs sign up to win books from various authors.

I attended Lori Foster Reader's Appreciation Conference in Ohio in June and met the fabulous Larissa Ione (and Lori Foster!) and pitched to an editor (and later sold a 3-book series to the editor). I'll also be attending in 2011.

I attended the KOD Death by Chocolate Party, Berkley reception and Harlequin party at RWA National 2010 (yes, this counts!).

I gave away promotional materials at the Berkley book signing at RWA National 2010.

I started or amped up my presence on Facebook, Goodreads, and Twitter.

I started a fan page on Facebook and bought Facebook ads for a month resulting in over 200 fans signing up.

I created an Amazon author page.

I ran an illustration contest for CBB on deviantart.com.

I set up the VClub Fan Club at [www.booksthatrock.com](http://www.booksthatrock.com).

I maintained my mailing list and sent out newsletters every month, including prize giveaways.

I submitted an author "note" to Book Junkies readers website.

Published guest spots/ blogs/articles/ interviews:

I joined the <http://trulymadlydeeplyromanceauthors.blogspot.com>, which gives away free reads every Saturday.

I have been a guest on several blogs and have participated in several blog "hops."

I have written several articles for this Promo Posse column in the SFARWA Newsletter.

I became a contributing editor for the International Thriller Writers Organization's e-zine newsletter and have written several articles on new releases by other authors.

I joined the Harlequin Romantic Suspense Blog.

I wrote an article for the Beyond Her Book Blog on a retreat I attended in South Carolina. (I met Barbara Vey at Lori Foster's conference - see how this is all tying together?)

I continued to create and post one writing cheat sheet for writers a month. (Note: I was first contacted by Savvy Authors, who requested I do chats for them, based on my cheat sheets.)

I wrote an article for the Romance Writer's Report (RWR) on Talent (January 2011 issue).

I created a cheat sheet for the RWR on Spiritual Warfare for Writers (May 2011 issue), and proposed regular updates; I will now be doing quarterly cheat sheets for them. Advertising:

I won advertising for a year on Romance Junkies through Brenda Novak's auction.

I won an advertising newswire on Author Sound Relations through Brenda Novak's auction this scheduled for May 2011, right when my debut novel releases.

I placed ad for CBB in the Romance Sells bookseller/librarian catalog Spring 2011.

I placed ad in RT Book Reviews "Debut Author Spotlight," May issue.

I sent 400 fliers to booksellers through RT's Booksellers That Care Program: FYI: several of these bookstores contacted me for swag for their book clubs, which I've sent.

I experimented with mugs, t-shirts, key chains and spent way too much money on give-away items.

I flew to New York to film a Project Paranormal video interview at Berkley Publishing.

I self-published several stories under my own name and a new pen name (Ava Meyers erotic novellas) to reach out to readers.

I polished and self-published a romance writing craft book with Tawny Weber.

I submitted my self-published stories for review. (For list of review sites, go to [www.justsoldabook.com](http://www.justsoldabook.com))

I sent ARCs of Chosen By Blood to reviewers.

I designed and printed Trading Cards for Chosen By Blood and Chosen By Fate. I created a couple of trailers for my self-published novellas/novels and posted on You Tube.

### Just recently:

I attended the 2011 Romantic Times Convention for the first time. I participated in Club RT and donated a gift basket, donated bookseller bags, paid to put goodies in 1200 attendee bags (including my trading cards), paid for my trailers to be displayed, and paid to reserve space in goodie alley. I participated in the 4/8 RT Book Expo and the 4/9 RT Book Fair.

I contacted NYT Bestselling Author Larissa Ione and scheduled a video chat with her for April 28. Advertised this info at RT Convention and on her website and blog.

I'm planning my launch party, including an Author Meet and Greet at my local Borders on May 7, 2011. I wrote a Dear Reader letter for Penguin Publishing Group's Website.

### I will be:

Attending Lori Foster's Readers Get Together in Ohio

Attending the RWA National Conference in New York signing at Literary Signing and Berkley Book Signing event

Continuing Blog Tour

Continuing to blog at Harlequin Romantic Suspense Blog

Continuing to write Promo posse article for May 2011, August 2011, November 2011

Will submit Cheatsheets for RWR in Aug 2011, November 2011, February 2011

Continuing to give workshops

And writing!

*Virna DePaul is a former criminal prosecutor who left law to pursue publication in romantic suspense and paranormal suspense. In March 2009, she set out to write a "big book, high concept, same but different" series. In November 2009, she got her first deal, selling the first two books of that series to Berkley. [www.virnadepaul.com](http://www.virnadepaul.com)*



## Go Big or Go Home: The Secret of Great Openings Part I

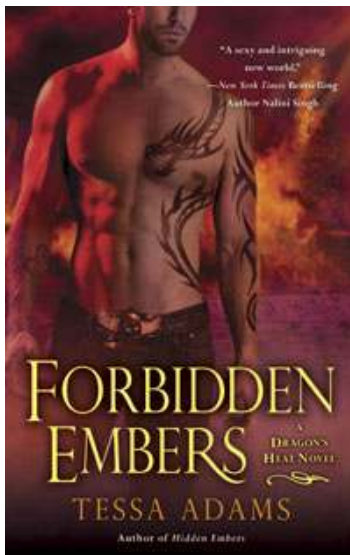
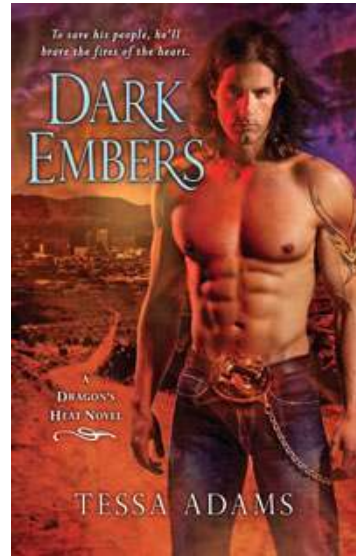
by Deidra Holcomb

*The following article first appeared in the May 2011 issue of DARA News, the monthly newsletter of Dallas Area Romance Authors. Vikki Wright Editor, DARA News*

While on my quest to discover the secrets of incredible story openings, I ran into Tracy Wolff aka Tessa Adams. Her openings have a visceral quality that launches the reader into the center of her characters. Within the first few pages, readers get an emotional reaction pulling them into the novels' world. I wanted to discover how to recreate this opening technique.

I'd already thought that openings might differ by genre. After talking to Tracy, I realized the nature of the heroes make a difference too. Tracy's characters are larger than life, capable of dark actions. Is there an opening that works best for dark or larger than life characters?

Tracy starts with the characters' emotional wounds. According to Tracy, her openings are "about pain. Find the characters' issues or pain and dig into it. If you start with that, the reader will understand how much the characters torture themselves over either what they've done; what they've failed to do; or who they are. The readers will give you a lot more latitude in what they'll allow, because they understand these men aren't evil for the sake of being evil." Tracy explained, "I don't write evil men. I write men who have had a lot of problems and had to make tough choices." Her opening pages demonstrate the toll of those decisions.



While big characters have a certain attraction, they also create distance from the reader. Tracy told me she thinks, "It's hard to tell writers you have to make your characters real and extraordinary." It may be hard to do, but Tracy certainly makes it look easy.

She's brilliant at creating intimacy from the start. She's going to give us a character who is bold, daring, able to do things we can't, but she doesn't start with grandiose actions. She starts with the quietness of their most intimate emotions. Here are a few of Tracy's opening: *Dark Embers* "He'd failed. Again." *Forbidden Embers* "He was dreaming. He knew it, understood it, yet could do nothing to wake himself up."

Tracy brings us a small character who we can understand and love based on their fear and anguish.

Emotions simplify the character. We've all felt them, so by starting with the character feelings, we can become the character. Once we become a part of the character, we can understand them and perhaps begin to believe we might also be capable of grand actions.

I learned from Tracy Wolff to hook the reader with a moment of the character's pain or fear. Then, the readers will not just follow through the character's lowest moments rather they will beg for more hoping for that final redemption.

*Deidra Alexander is an aspiring author of paranormal and fantasy. If she could be one thing other than an author, it would be a twitter comedian. Follow her at:*

*@deidraalexander and [www.deidraalexander.wordpress.com](http://www.deidraalexander.wordpress.com)*



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## Editor's Message

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### Write a Love Knot Article

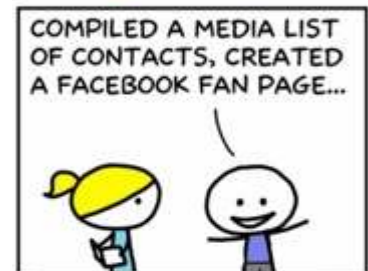
I am actively seeking article submissions from ORWA members. Since the Love Knot is electronic, there are no specific word count requirements. An article can be as long or as short as the topic requires. **Our articles are shared with all RWA chapter newsletter editors so writing an article is a good way to get free publicity.** Be sure to include a short signature line with the address for your website or blog.

If you have any articles or announcements you'd like included in our newsletter please forward them to me at [ykarenes@yahoo.ca](mailto:ykarenes@yahoo.ca) by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Thank you!

Karen Smock, Editor

#### FIRST THINGS FIRST



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