

KEYNOTES



The newsletter of the Romance Writers of America / New York City Chapter #6 *AUGUST 2017*

**NEXT CHAPTER MEETING & CRITIQUE SESSION: SATURDAY, JULY 8
TRS, 40 EXCHANGE PLACE, 3RD FLOOR, 12-4PM**

TOPIC: POWER COUPLES: MAKING LOVERS

SPEAKER: DAMON SUEDE



Great romance starts with fascinating relationships: it takes two to tangle... Bring your fictional folks to the next level with a simple, powerful technique that will strengthen your ideas, your voice, and your projects at any stage.

During this two hour session we'll tackle a characterization strategy that goes beyond boilerplate traits and faux interviews to build the perfect duo to dazzle your readers. Amp the action, attraction, and interaction between your toothsome twosome. Whether you like to wing it or bring it, you'll leave this workshop with a new set of practical, hands-on approaches to making lovers who pop off the page.

BIO: Damon Suede grew up out-n-proud deep in the anus of right-wing America, and escaped as soon as it was legal. He has lived all over: Houston, New York, London, Prague. Along the way, he's earned his crust as a model, a messenger, a promoter, a programmer, a sculptor, a singer, a stripper, a bookkeeper, a bartender, a techie, a teacher, a director... but writing has ever been his bread and butter. He has been happily partnered for over a decade with the most loving, handsome, shrewd, hilarious, noble man to walk this planet.♥

GOLDEN APPLE AWARD WINNERS! BY VICE PRESIDENT STACEY AGDERN

Congratulations to all! Watch Chapter Loop for information on reception.

Beverly Jenkins - Lifetime Achievement
Sarah MacLean - Author of the Year
Esi Sogah - Editor of the Year
Latoya Smith – Agent of the Year
St. Martin's Press/Swerve - Publisher of the Year
Women of Color in Romance - Media Source of the Year ♥



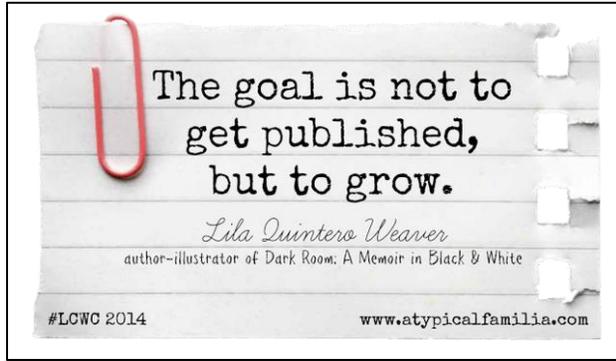


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THANK YOU!

To Our Contributing Writers
 Maria Cox, Alexis Daria, Kate McMurray,
 Ursula Renée, Jennifer Welsh, Monica Yang

2017 CHAPTER CALENDAR

Jul 8 Aug 5 Sep 9 Oct 7 Nov 4 Dec 2

MEETING INFORMATION

RWA/NYC meets the first Saturday of each month. Meetings are held at TRS, 40 Exchange Place, NYC. 12 noon. Membership is at the discretion of the Board. Annual dues are \$40. Make all checks payable to RWA/NYC. There will be a \$20 fee on returned checks.

ATTENTION: The Board welcomes all comments/suggestions/etc. Please send emails to info@rwanyc.com.

SEPTEMBER THEME

TIME & PLACE

and why it’s important to your novel

PLUS! We welcome articles on all topics, book reviews, conference notes, etc. etc.

KEYNOTES DEADLINE

Send articles to keynoteseditor@gmail.com by the **15th of the month**. All articles must be typed and up to 500 words. Send pictures as attachments; not in article.

RWA/NYC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Kate McMurray
 Vice President/Events: Stacey Agdern
 Vice President/Contest: LaQuette
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 Past President: Ursula Renée

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 Michael Molloy
 Website: Ursula Renée

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rwanycblogginginthebigapple.blogspot.com



**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: WHAT ARE YOU READING?
BY KATE MCMURRAY**



I've never been one of those writers who can't read the genre I'm writing. I understand some writers need the distance, but I've found for myself that really emerging myself in genre generally benefits my writing.

But this year, I've read very little romance. Partly that's because a slew of nonfiction books I really wanted to read were published. I like learning new things and have a lot of varied interests; this year, I've read books on Irish genealogy, the history of American music, the history of immigration in New York City, the American Civil War, queens in sixteenth century Europe, the 1972 Olympics, and the Russian Revolution, among other topics. I read a couple of suspense novels that didn't have much romance in them, too. In other words, I've been reading. Just not romance.

And I love romance novels! My apartment is full of them. There are literal stacks of mass market paperbacks waiting for me to read them. Just, you know.

I finished writing a novel about a month ago, and while I'm shopping it, I've been plotting out what to write next and thinking about things like emotional resonance and stakes and all the good stuff that readers respond to in romance novels, and I've had the thought more than once, "How the heck do I do this?" I mean, I obviously *know* how to write a romance novel because I've published seventeen of them, but it's like I forgot how to structure one. And after a lot of hitting my head on my desk (sometimes literally!) I realized that part of the issue is that I haven't been reading romance.

A lot of us arrived at writing romance because we loved reading it. My beginning to read a lot of romance and my realizing that the Great American Novel I was struggling to write was really a romance novel kind of happened at the same time, but as I started writing more romance, I also started reading more romance, and I learned a lot about the genre. Not just what the genre conventions are, although I did pick up on those, but more about what I as a reader responded to. Like, what was it about a book that made me happily sigh, or cry, or otherwise have a big emotional reaction? And then I started to pick apart what I read. Why am I finding this boring or exciting? How is the author structuring the novel to increase tension? Why is this scene pulling at all of my heartstrings?

Reading critically is a useful skill for a writer. Reading and writing are subjective to a certain degree; we all have preferences and pet peeves. There are objective standards, obviously—adherence to grammar and language conventions, a strong voice, precise word choice, varying sentence structure, etc., etc.—but a lot of other elements of a book are harder to define as "good" or "bad." We all have tropes we love and those we hate, sub-genre preferences, even style preferences. But what we can learn from reading critically are what we value as readers, and then we can apply that to our writing. No writer can be all things to all readers, so think about what *you* value in what you read and think about how you can emulate that. Not copy; it's important to cultivate your own voice, too. But how can you write a book that would bowl you over if you were reading it?



For example, I read a novel that had a scene that moved me so much I still think about it sometimes. I read somewhere between fifty and a seventy-five books a year, typically, so for me to really remember something says something about how hard it hit me. And I later went back and reread parts of the book to figure out how exactly the author had gotten that reaction from me—the building blocks she'd used to get to that point. Because that's what I want to achieve, too; I want to put out books that readers are still thinking about later.

Or, last fall, I was working on writing a contemporary romance with relatively low stakes—nobody's life was in danger—and I was worried the story wasn't exciting enough, so I started reading other contemporary romances to see how other authors handled similar stories. This helped me identify things I was doing well—hitting the right emotional beats, for example—and things I was not doing well. (The books I read had better developed secondary characters, for example.)

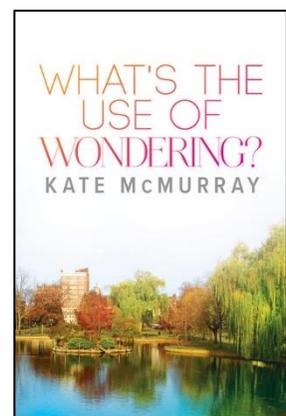
I think it's useful, too, to take a look at what doesn't work. If you aren't connecting with a book, what flaws can you identify in the author's writing? How can you avoid that in or improve on your own writing?

I think it's also worth it to read other genres. I like immersing myself in genre when I'm writing, but my reading tastes are pretty varied (as I guess you can probably tell). There's a lot to be learned from how other writers approach certain themes, not just romance. For example, one of my literary idols is Toni Morrison, who excels at showing without telling. (To oversimplify. Her books, the later books especially, include a lot of complex imagery that is left for the reader to interpret. I think about that a lot when resisting my own temptation to explain without showing.) Reading the classics can teach you a lot about how novels have been structured for 200 years. Reading literary fiction can help you think about how to use language to convey ideas without merely explaining plot points from A to Z. Reading poetry can change the way you think about writing prose.

After all, in many romance novels, the romance plot is not the only element. A lot of us write in sub-genres—romantic suspense, fantasy romance, paranormal romance, etc.—and taking deep dives into those genres can help us build tighter suspense plots, improve our world-building, make our antagonists more terrifying.

Bottom line: as writers, we can learn a lot from reading, so don't overlook it as part of your writing routine!♥

Kate McMurray is an award-winning author of gay romance and an unabashed romance fan. When she's not writing, she works as a nonfiction editor, dabbles in various crafts, and is maybe a tiny bit obsessed with baseball. She has served as President of Rainbow Romance Writers, the LGBT romance chapter of Romance Writers of America; and as Vice President of RWA/NYC. She lives in Brooklyn, NY. Visit her at www.katemcmurray.com.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Robin Lovett
Gemma Snow
Maria Vale
Ruth Vincent



**CHAPTER MINUTES: JULY 8
BY SECRETARY JENN WELSH**

Attendance: 19 members

President Kate McMurray called the General Meeting to order at 12:10pm

Alexis Daria motioned to approve the June 2017 chapter meeting minutes and Maria Cox seconded the motion. Meeting minutes approved, no objections or abstentions.

Treasurer's Report: Maria Cox reported that we have \$5,542 in the budget. Increase has been seen with the applicants of the Kathryn Hayes contest.

Secretary's Reports

77 active members confirmed. Member roster is up to date and available for the board to communicate with members. All new members have been added to our Yahoo group.

President's Report:

Kate also announced next meetings speaker: Agent Latoya Smith who will speak at our July 9th meeting. She will discuss, preparing your manuscript and documents for submission.

Golden Apples: Congratulations to all the winners of the Golden Apples. Stacey has informed all winners.

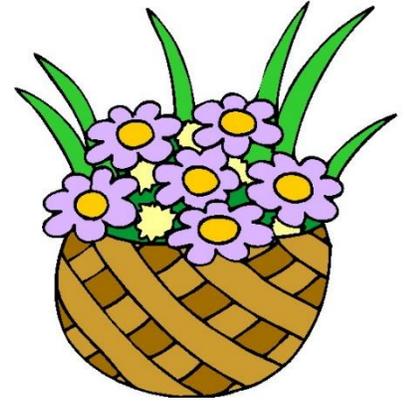
Beverly Jenkins - Lifetime Achievement
Sarah MacLean - Author of the Year
Esi Sogah - Editor of the Year
Latoya Smith – Agent of the Year
St. Martin's Press/Swerve - Publisher of the Year
Women of Color of Romance - Media Source of the Year

Stacey is currently looking for a venue for us to host the awards ceremony. Please email GoldenApples@gmail.com for guest list suggestions.

Kathryn Hayes "When Sparks Fly" Contest: Advertising is underway and the submissions are rolling in. We still need member participation in getting the word out on social media. LaQuette has provided the group with both written and image collateral to use. For those who would like to participate in judging, reach out to Laquette@novelsbylaquette.com.

CHAPTER MINUTES--CONTINUED**COMMITTEE REPORTS***Newsletter and Websites*

Keynotes theme for next issue is: Sexy/Spicy Scenes – 200-300 words. Articles up to 500 words. Maria F also mentioned Christmas in July.



Publicity RWA/NYC night Lady Jane's Monday, July 10th. Final reader list:

- Harper Miller
- Michael Molloy
- Erica Obey
- Ursula Renée

Book Cover Fridays is a great way for our authors to publicize. Let Maria F. know about any upcoming press, blog tours or releases. RWA/NYC is here to support your projects so add RWA/NYC to your marketing/advertising plan.

Brooklyn Book Festival – The festival will take place on September 17th. There are \$40 spots at tables and volunteers are needed. If you'd like to volunteer, respond to Michael Malloy who has sent an email via the Yahoo Group.

Genrepaalooza takes place on August 23rd from 6 -9pm. This is a members' only event with open bar. Final fee for RWA/NYC members will be announced shortly.

OTHER

Kate discussed the survey results and that that members really want everything. Critique groups were something that came up, often in the survey. Kate will send out an email asking for volunteers to help with a new framework for the group.

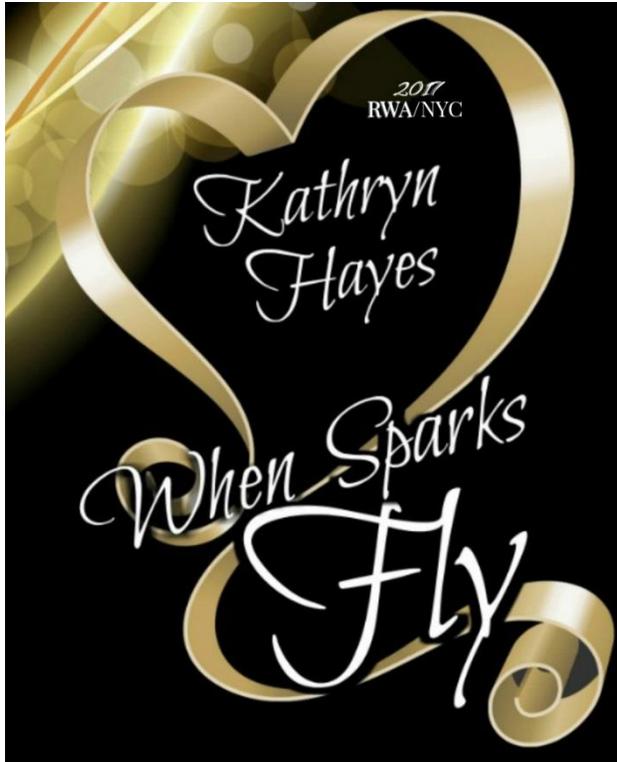
Round Robin begins.

Speaker: Literary Agent. Latoya Smith on preparing your agent query submissions.

Chapter meeting adjourned at 12:28pm.♥

Picture: Chapter Board Meeting (from bottom up): Alexis Daria, PRO Liaison; Jenn Welsh, Secretary; Kate McMurray, President; Michael Molloy, Chairman BKBF; Maria Ferrer, Blog Coordinator; Stacey Agdern, Vice President; and Maria Cox, Treasurer.





RWA/NYC is looking for published stories where the spark is undeniable, and the chemistry is explosive. Check out www.rwanyc.com/guidelines.html for contest entry details. Submissions open July 1st -September 1st

Eligibility

Published submissions only, with an original publication date of January 1st—December 31st, 2016 (manuscript must have been published via traditional publishing, self-publishing, or small press, and must be available on platforms such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc.)

Timeline

- Submissions open: July 1st - Sept 1, 2017
- Finalists Announced: November 10th, 2017
- Winners Announced: December 2nd, 2017 Format
- Electronic submissions only
- PDF, and or mobi.

Fee

\$25 RWA member \$35 Non-RWA member

Contact

Contest Coordinator: LaQuette Email: rwanyccontest@gmail.com♥

PHOTO ALBUM: RWA17 NATIONAL CONFERENCE



Several chapter members attended the RWA 2017 National Conference. They will share their thoughts with us in the next Keynotes; meanwhile, here are some of their fun photos.

LITERACY BOOK SIGNING



Ruth A. Casie



K.M. Jackson



Joanna Shupe



Ursula Renée

PHOTO ALBUM: RWA17 NATIONAL CONFERENCE- CONTINUED

RITA AWARDS



Falguni Kothari



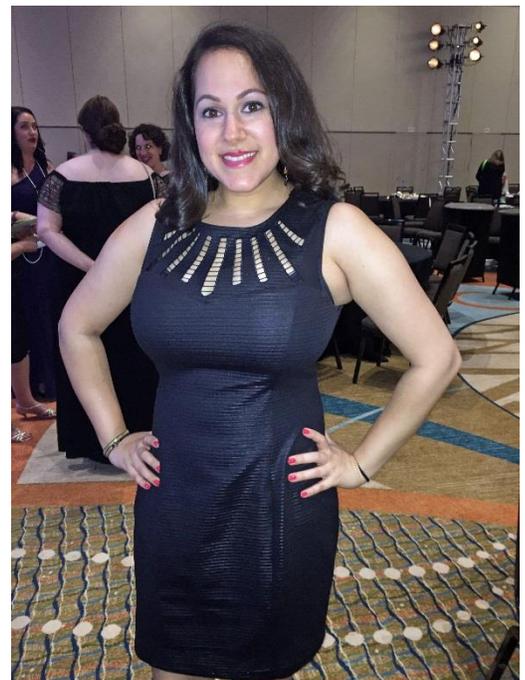
Ursula Renée



Dee Davis



Harper Miller & friends



Golden Heart Finalist Alexis Daria

PHOTO ALBUM: RWA17 NATIONAL CONFERENCE- CONTINUED



K.M. Jackson & friend



Mary Altman & President Kate McMurray

WORKSHOPS



Falguni & Sonali Dev

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN: SHARED SPACE
BY URSULA RENEE

This is a new monthly feature. Members are invited to share their writing room with us.

While some read during their daily commute, I write during the sixty minutes it takes me to get from my apartment to the office.

The process begins with my ten minute walk to the subway station. During this time, I organize my thoughts and work on my plots in my head. Occasionally, I will talk through a dialogue to put the right words in my characters' mouths. Thankfully, the few people I encounter are too wrapped up in their own thoughts to wonder about the woman who not only talks to herself, but answers the voices in her head, too.

When I board the train, I hold on to the pole with one hand and type into my telephone with the other. If I am lucky enough to get a seat, I pull out a notebook and write longhand until I reach my station.

The train is not usually considered the most ideal writing space, however, my commute gives me the opportunity to put words on paper without the distractions of the dust, cats and child I have at home. Each day I can complete one to three pages of text, depending on whether or not there is "train traffic ahead."♥

Ursula Renée writes stories set in the early and mid-twentieth century with a diverse cast who must examine their own beliefs and challenge society's conventions to reach their happy-for-now. When she is not writing, Ursula enjoys photography, drawing and stone carving. She is the mother to one son and two cats.



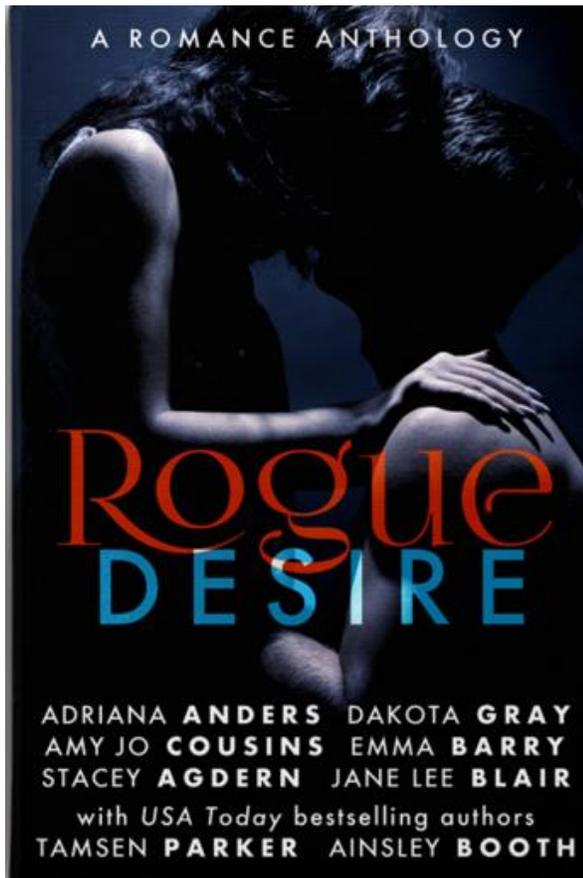
MEMBER NEWS

Stacey Agdern, Alexis Daria and Robin Lovett will be featured speakers on August 7 at Lady Jane's Salon.

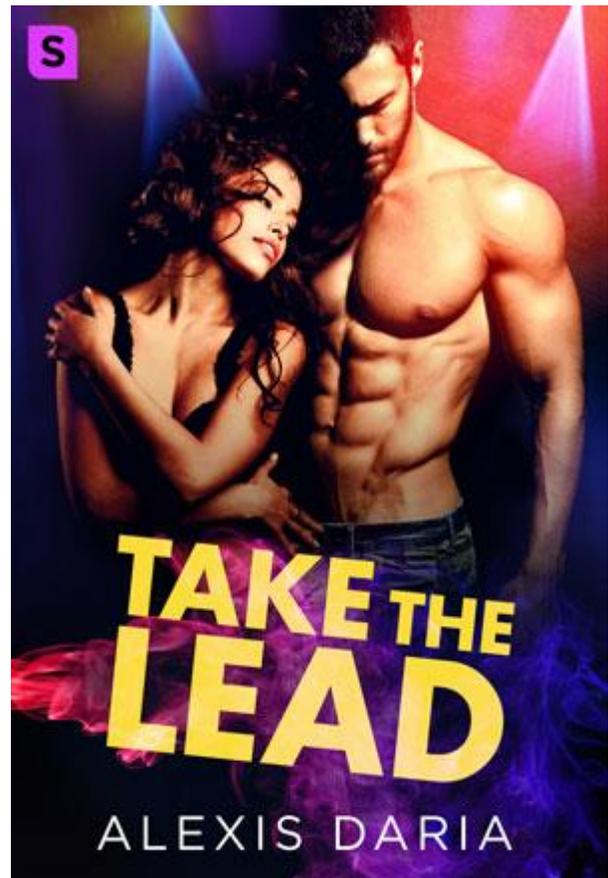
Alexis Daria's TAKE THE LEAD is an RWA Golden Heart Finalist. She is also a finalist in the Fantasy, Futuristic, and Paranormal category of the Golden Rose Contest, sponsored by the Rose City Romance Writers in Portland, Oregon. AND! She won first place in Single-Title in the Great Expectations Contest sponsored by North Texas RWA.

Rosemary Ellis is a finalist in the Golden Rose Contest, sponsored by the Rose City Romance Writers in Portland, Oregon.♥

MEMBERS ON THE SHELF

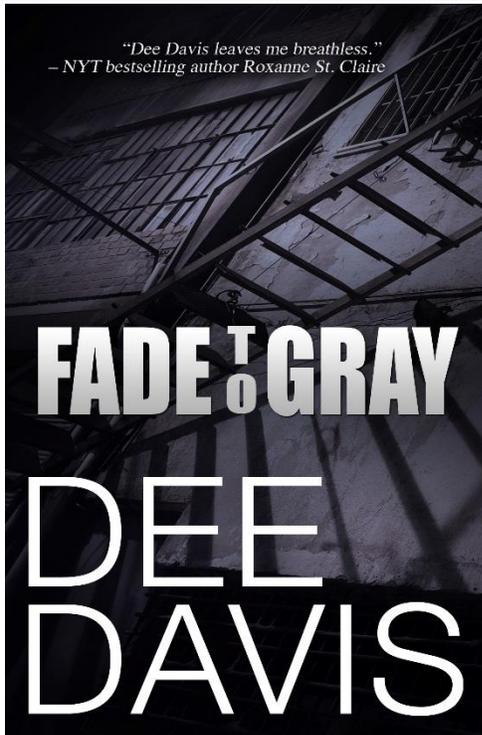


ROGUE DESIRE anthology
includes story by Stacey Agdern

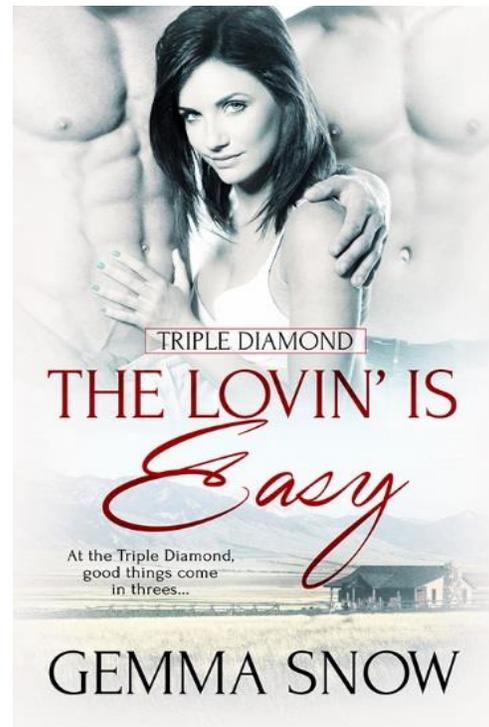


TAKE THE LEAD
by Alexis Daria

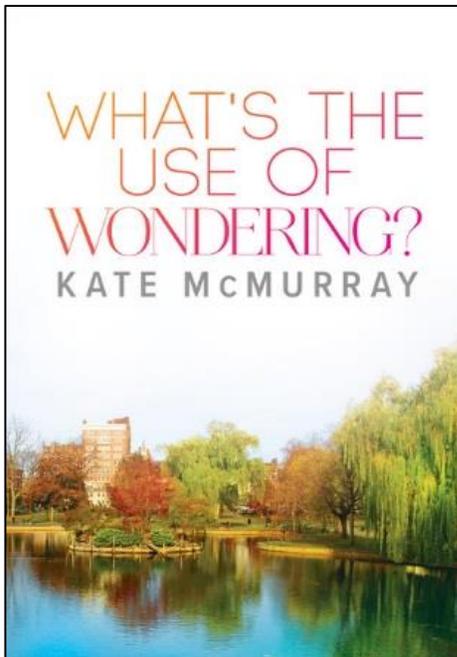
MEMBERS ON THE SHELF -- CONTINUED



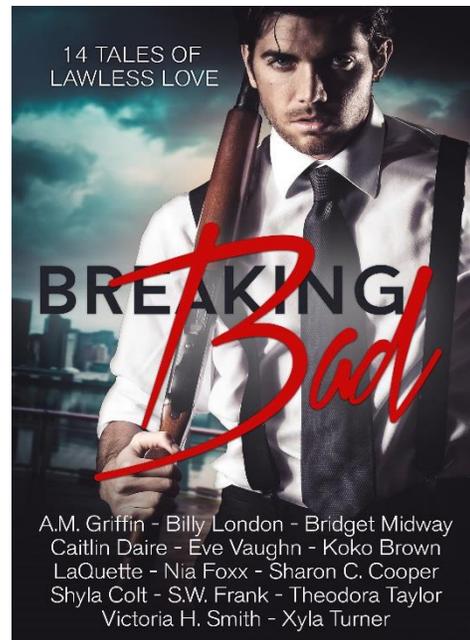
FADE TO GRAY
by Dee Davis



THE LOVING IS EASY
by Gemma Snow



WHAT'S THE USE OF WONDERING?
by Kate McMurray



BREAKING BAD
includes stories by LaQuette & Xyla Turner

REVIEW: JULY MEETING WITH LATOYA C. SMITH — WORKING WITH AN AGENT BY ALEXIS DARIA

July's RWA-NYC meeting was visited by editor-turned-agent Latoya C. Smith of the L. Perkins Agency for a workshop called "Working with an Agent." Latoya has had an impressive career in publishing, starting as an assistant to author Teri Woods, and going on to work as an editor with Kensington, Grand Central, and Samhain before turning her attention to agenting. Here's the workshop description: "Everything you wanted to know about why to get an agent and how to find the best one. This workshop will cover how to prepare to query, what to look for in a good agent, what your agent can do for you, and what to do if things go wrong. This will be a workshop for writers at all stages of their careers." It sounds like a lot to get through in one meeting, but Latoya covered it all.



Latoya began the workshop by urging authors to think carefully about their relationships with their agent and publisher. These are your representatives, and should be earning their 15% cut of your sales. As an editor, she wasn't a fan of agents who sold the book and then never got involved in the rest of the publishing process. Editors need the agent to explain things to author and facilitate ease of process. With this in mind, she offered a lot of information and advice to the chapter, answering questions as she went.

When searching for the right agent, she advises having all your ducks in a row with your query letter and synopsis.

1. Query letter

- Don't be lazy. No "Dear Agent." Have the agent's name spelled correctly.
- Start with an intro to the work. Genre, word count, comps. This lets the agent know right off the bat if this is the right book for them.
- Editors need comp titles before they acquire you so they can sell it. It's even better if comps are from that publishing house. The more you know your audience, the more you help your chance of being published.
- Then you want a short paragraph describing the book, like a back cover blurb. Introduce the characters, conflict, and what they want to resolve. Make it enticing and exciting.
- Follow this up with a bio paragraph. If you've won contests, write for a blog, have a relevant degree, are part of an organization like RWA - include that info in your bio.



2. Synopsis.

Have a thorough but concise synopsis of the book. No more than 3-5 pages. Mention secondary characters briefly if they will have books in the series. Include the ending! The blurb in the query is where you leave the agent or editor wanting more. In the synopsis, you want to tell how the story ends.

3. Check what they're asking for.

Follow agency or publisher guidelines. Everyone wants different materials and you don't want to be rejected on a formality. Show that you can follow directions.

4. Closing.

Thank them.

5. Follow up.

For Latoya, she suggests following up with her after 4-6 weeks, since she makes an effort to respond to every query. (Not all agents do this, and some require longer, so check their agency guidelines.)

A few more notes on searching for the right agent:

- Keep an eye out for submission calls and pitch events.
- To find the right agent: *research research research*. See who reps your favorite authors. Ask your friends.
- Chemistry is HUGE. You want to make sure it's a good partnership and they have your best interests at heart. At the end of the day, it's a business relationship.
- Google "literary agents" and see who comes up, then check their websites and interviews. You can also use Query Tracker and Publishers Marketplace.
- This business is so subjective. Do your research and go with what works for you.
- Sign up for newsletters from publishers you want to submit to. It will show you what they're publishing.
- No multiple submissions within same agency or imprint.
- For in person pitches, Latoya says if you've nailed the query, use that for your pitch. It's good if they ask more questions, it means they're interested.

What your agent should bring to the table:

- Your agent should never be too busy for you. Email replies within 24-48 hours tops unless on vacation or out of town.
- Brainstorming ideas for projects. They're making money off you and these projects, so they should be there to help you brainstorm new projects. Some should also be available for a first round edit, to make sure the submission is strong.
- You should be able to trust your agent. You don't want to be taking business advice from someone you don't trust.
- Your agent should be keeping you in the loop about everything related to the submission process. Discuss the submission list before it goes out.
- Cover, cover copy, promo campaign. Your agent should also be helping you with these things.
- She cautions against agents who are too laid back and not involved, or agents who are too involved.
- Your agent should be teaching you the market.
- You might have a story idea, but it's your agent's job to tell you what's working in the market or not. They could also tell you which to send to publisher and which to self-pub.
- Your agent should be invested in your career, not just the one book.
- Your agent should be part of every step of the publishing process, keeping you inspired and on deadline. They should know what's going on with you, as your partner, so they can be your advocate with the publishing house. They can jump in to be the "bad guy" when necessary.
- Manuscript edits
- Contract negotiations
- Covers
- Cover copy
- Final books
- Placement and availability for purchase
- Publicity and promotion brainstorming

When you should part ways with your agent:

This is your career. You're paying them 15%. Don't stick with someone to be nice and because you don't want to hurt their feelings. Follow your gut.

- When they have no time for you.
- When they don't help with brainstorming.
- If you don't have the same vision for your career.

A few more words of advice for authors:

- Always think ahead.
- Always keep notes of publicity and sales results. Always keep track of your publicity stuff and note what people respond to. Apply the stuff that worked well, and then some, for book 2.
- Don't be afraid to ask for sales numbers.
- Try to limit the number of emails you send your agent or publicist. Include in one email, rather than sending a bunch of little ones. But also don't send really long emails.

- Understand that your book's performance will determine how much your publisher spends on you for the next book. Do everything you can to push the book. You have to come up with ideas, make sure they're being carried out, and spend your own money.
- If self-publishing, look for an agent who is strong in subrights, like foreign and audio.
- If you dream of having a book published by a publisher, don't self-pub it first. Once it's out there, it's out there.
- Pen names can be useful if you have a bad track record, or a day job you'd like to keep separate from your publishing career. They can also be helpful if you write completely different kinds of stories in different markets. Pen names set up reader expectations, and can even be a way to "restart" your career.♥

Alexis Daria's debut contemporary romance, TAKE THE LEAD, is a 2017 Golden Heart® finalist and will be released in Fall 2017 from SMP Swerve. On Sunday evenings, Alexi's co-hosts #RWchat, a weekly Twitter chat for romance writers. She also serves as PRO Liaison for the New York City chapter of RWA, and is represented by Sarah E. Younger from Nancy Yost Literary Agency. Alexis loves social media, and you can find her as @alexisdaria on Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, @alexidarial on Facebook, and follow her blog, alexisdaria.com.

(THE WORST THING YOU
WRITE IS BETTER
THAN THE BEST THING
YOU DID NOT WRITE.)

NIGHT AT LADY JANE'S SALON, JULY 10

Champagne for everyone! RWA/NYC celebrated at July's Lady Jane's Salon where FIVE members read: Erica Obey, Harper Miller, Michael Molloy, Ursula Renée & Hope Tarr.

**The Gang
is all here!**



**Maria F, Ursula,
Kate, Maria C &
Elizabeth**



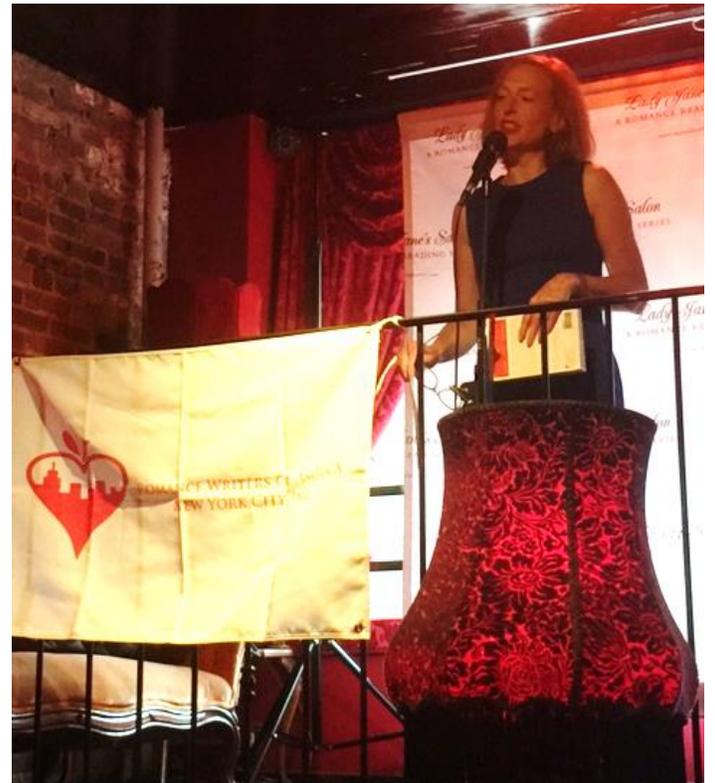
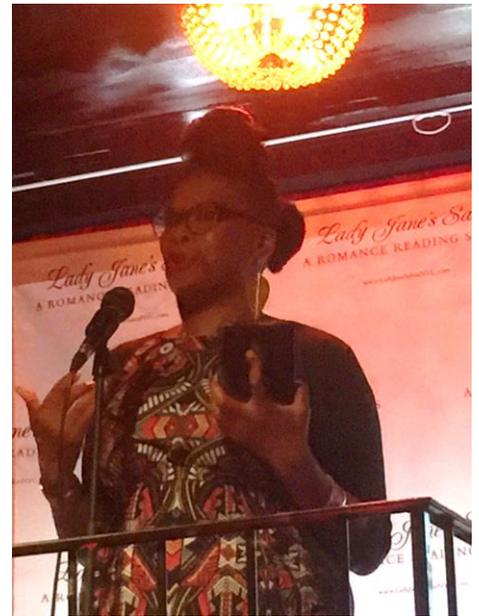
**Monica,
Jennifer,
Daria Defore,
LaQuette &
Robin**



NIGHT AT LADY JANE'S SALON - CONTINUED



**Readers:
Erica,
Harper,
Ursula,
Hope &
Michael**



NIGHT AT LADY JANE'S SALON - CONTINUED



Alexis, Maria F, Maria C & Kate



Alexis, Elizabeth, LaQuette



Ursula (front), Alexis, Robin, Harper, Kate & Maria C.



Jennifer, Laura Adriana & Kate

MONTHLY THEME: FEELING HOT! HOT! HOT!

This month our members are sharing excerpts from their work. The hotter the better.



THE ELEVATOR RIDE
BY MARIA COX

Mona's gaze settled on him. "You told your girlfriend about our one-night stand?" She huffed, "That was brave of you."

The one-night stand several months back had been more like an all-night *fuck fest*, Rex recalled.

That evening after three rounds of drinks at the hotel bar Rex offered to walk Mona to her suite. And not just because escorting her was the courteous thing to do, but also for selfish reasons. Mona was flirting all day and Rex had no doubt that Mona would be up for anything.

Sure as shit minutes after they entered her suite Mona began to strip. Later inside the hot tub, she lowered her body onto the water opening her folds to the swirls of water. As the jets circulated and stroked her cunt she climaxed instantly. When Mona's sexual torment became too much to bear he too got naked and joined her.

It was sheer lust that made Rex yanked Mona towards him and shoved his cock inside her mouth. In no time she was choking on his stiffened mass, taking him deep inside her mouth and down her throat. Within minutes powerful, determined strokes awarded him a satisfying orgasm and as he toppled Rex sprayed his sticky seed on her lips, chin, and her breasts. He watched with fascination as her tits glistened and bobbed in the swirl of bubbles.

Sex with Mona Parker had been dirty, nasty, and raw.

“I didn’t tell Aimee anything.” Rex said when their silence grew uncomfortable. “She guessed.”♥

Maria Cox is a PRO member of Romance Writers of America and also the Treasurer of RWA/NYC. Maria has also served as President of the Phoenix Writers Club. Maria has been writing stories since she was a young girl. She picked up her first romance novel when she was just eleven years old and has loved the genre ever since. Maria writes sensual romance, stories that showcase strong, sassy, and sexy characters. When not writing fiction, Maria works as a technical writer. She lives in Queens, New York. Please visit her site www.mariacox.net and/or follow her on Twitter.

BITTER BLUES

BY URSULA RENÉE

Randy opened his mouth to list the reasons they would not be spending the night there, but before he uttered the first syllable, Cass pressed her lips against his and stroked his tongue with hers. She was no longer the shy, naïve woman he’d met years ago. She was a confident woman who went after what she wanted, and to his delight, she wanted him.



He became hard so fast his head spun. They had made love only hours before he left for the service so he could take the memory of her with him. But the memories had been a poor substitute for the real person. He could not feel her body writhing beneath his, savor her sweet kisses or hear her soft cries before she came.

Randy dropped the bags at his feet and reached for Cass. Instead of coming to him, she pulled back and pushed his coat off his shoulders.

“What’s the rush?” he gasped, trying to catch his breath.

“I want you in me before I wake up,” she replied, clawing at the buttons on his shirt.

Randy understood the sentiment. Too many mornings he had awakened from dreams so real he’d reached for her, hoping to enjoy one more kiss before he was forced to roll out of bed. It was only after he caressed the air that he would open his eyes to the disappointing view of the sagging bunk over him.♥

*Ursula Renée writes stories set in the early and mid-twentieth century with a diverse cast who must examine their own beliefs and challenge society's conventions to reach their happy-for-now. Her latest novel, *Bitter Blues*, is the second book in her *Big Band Series* and it explores the challenges an interracial couple faces after saying, “I do,” in the 1940s. When she is not writing, Ursula enjoys photography, drawing and stone carving. She is the mother to one son and two cats.*

**CHRISTMAS IN JULY – AN EXCERPT FROM GIGOLO ALL THE WAY
BY JN WELSH**

It's Christmas in July so what better way to celebrate than to give you a sexy scene from my Christmas novella, GIGOLO ALL THE WAY. The scene picks up after Noelle Rudolph has hired gigolo Nicholas Partridge for Christmas. They are getting to know each other and make a small pit stop to ensure they pull off the ruse. This is from Chapter 5.



Cole pushed her boundaries. But when she stood in her matching bra and panty, he knew that she'd be his tonight. Their ruse only provided the opportunity. "You can't cringe every time I touch you or pull away when I kiss you. When we gaze at each other, we share secrets with a glance. This secret. We don't have to be in love, but we need to be believable."

"What if we have sex and it's awful and I hate it. That'll only make things worse."

"Trust me, honey. You won't hate it." He bit his tongue. He had found an endearment that she didn't object to when he called her "sweetness." With bruised ego, his subconscious reverted to the one that seemed to rile her up.

"Cocky ass," she mumbled. "And for the last time don't call me honey." The rise in her tone was lethal.

"Why do you hate that one so much?"

"Because you use it like a condescending weapon, that's why."

He swallowed his pride and the retort that was on the tip of his tongue. "You're right. I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

She breathed heavily and he stroked her buttery soft skin to soothe her. She avoided his eyes and in his experience with women both as a gigolo and studying psychology, her awkward avoidance stemmed from something more.

"When was the last time you were with someone, Elle?"

Her eyes shot daggers at him and she was about to nail into him, but he continued his caress on her arms and her expression softened. "It's been a while."

"But you have been with a man before."

She laughed. "Yes. I'm not a virgin, Cole."

She didn't move away from his touch. The way her chest moved, combined with the flush on her face, betrayed her desire. She wanted him, but she deflected with humor. He continued to probe. He didn't know why this particular question surfaced but it did. "Have you had an orgasm before?"♥

JN Welsh is RWA/NYC Chapter Secretary. She writes contemporary romances. Visit her at www.jnwelsh.com.

WHAT'S THE USE OF WONDERING?

BY KATE MCMURRAY

"The QSU people I know all refer to you as 'that hot blond guy.'"



He scoffed. "Are you serious?"

"Not to your face, apparently... I'm just saying. You're all blond and abs."

He grinned. "You think I'm hot, is what you're saying."

I rolled my eyes, mostly for show. "Don't let it go to your head."

"Well, Logan, if you ever pull that stick out of your ass, I'm right here on the other side of the room."

What was he saying? Did he want me? Was that an invitation? I was too flabbergasted to say anything. He seemed to lose patience, huffing out a breath and leaning away from me. He moved like he was about to stand up, but I couldn't have that, not without figuring out what he really meant.

So I acted. I hooked a hand around his head, pulled him back close to me, and smashed my lips against his.

Peter let out a surprised gasp that feathered over my lips before he kissed me back, opening his mouth like he was trying to devour me. My poor sexually deprived body went instantly on red alert, tingling everywhere as my senses caught up with what my head had decided to do. His lips were soft and his mouth was hot, and he tasted like spearmint gum. The hair at the base of his skull was just as soft as I'd imagined, and his skin was warm and smooth. He put his big meaty hands on my shoulders, and a sigh passed through me. *Finally*, my body seemed to be saying.

He pulled away slightly and met my gaze. "Is this what you want?" he asked softly.

"I've been thinking about it since the first time I saw your stupid, beautiful face."

"I love that you still sound pissed off about it."

Then he kissed me. And I got no studying done that night.♥

Kate McMurray is RWA/NYC Chapter President. She writes contemporary and historical romance. Visit her at www.katemcmurray.com.

ARTIFICE
BY MONICA YANG

The Cybernetic Andrea's team of human rebels caught last night should have pistons and rods instead of long limbs corded with muscles. It shouldn't have a trail of slightly curling brown hair running from its stomach muscles to its black briefs, the only item it's allowed.



Do the briefs hide more male human anatomy as well?

It clears its throat, and her gaze snaps back to her work. She eats another mint and polishes her pistol until it glints. She almost forgets.

"Water." It says again. The voice is deep but thirst-cracked. Time passes. "Please."

The cell door's open before she has time to think. Five strides take her to the shackled male body design had made perfect.

She pushes the cup to its lips with one hand and aims the pistol at its chest with the other. "Hurry up." Gruffness doesn't hide the shakiness in her voice.

The water disappears in three gulps.

She turns, but Cybernetic is a flash, unnatural. It lurches as far as the chains allow, pressing Its nose against her wrist. She drops the cup, stifles a scream.

It inhales. "Real mint."

The mint candy was soft, and there's a sticky residue on her palm. "S-so what?"

"I have an artificial memory but this is real."

Its lips slide up to her palm, and its tongue touches the base of her thumb. She doesn't breath. He's still for two heartbeats, as if waiting for her to shoot. She doesn't, and It licks to the ticklish spot between her index and middle fingers.

He withdraws and leans back against the wall. "Sweet."

Her cheeks burn. "I could have shot you."

"But now I know what sugar tastes like."♥

Monica Yang, a Brooklyn native, writes romantic fantasy and scifi. The following is a snippet from a short story.

ROPES, FLOGGERS, WHIPS, OH MY!**BY DEL CARMEN**

Instead of an excerpt, I thought I'd write about the BDSM Hero. As many of you know my sister, Doctor Charley, is a sexologist and every August she holds a three-day BDSM Writers Con for writers wanting to know more about BDSM with experts from the Life and real-time demos. As a writer of erotica, I knew I had to go. Plus, reading about "the lifestyle" is one thing; actually, seeing it live is another.

First, let me say that BDSM is not romance. Romance is flowery, sexy, risqué, with lots of I love you's and "romantic" gestures. BDSM is not. BDSM can be sexy but it doesn't do flowers or candy. It's about whips, paddles, ropes, blindfolds and pain. Lots of pain. However, it's also about respect, mutual consent, play scenes and after care.

As I watched the BDSM play scenes, I was mesmerized by the care the Dominant took with his Submissive. The titles were somewhat jarring; there is no equality in that equation. And her wearing a collar was off putting; alright, offensive...sort of. The Dom proceeded to tie up and blindfold his Sub and was flogging her steadily. Not a romantic image, is it? Or is IT?

Suddenly I noticed something important that changed my view of the BDSM "Hero." As he prepped her for the coming pain, he was taking care to check that the ropes were not too tight, that the blindfold wasn't uncomfortable, that the 10 strokes were not more than she could take, even as she begged to be hit harder. Here was tenderness at its core. He was not just dishing out pain; her wellbeing was his primary concern. He untied her; wrapped her in a warm blanket; took her in his arms and gave her water; checked her pulse, her temperature. Here at last was the true BDSM Hero – a loving, caring, romantic hero.

The BDSM relationship is about pain, but it's also about love and after care. He may not use romantic words or bring gifts, but he is a Hero. And isn't that we all long for? A Hero who doesn't just give us a quick thank you kiss for the great orgasm and turns over, but one who takes us into his arms afterwards and makes sure we had as much pleasure as he did, and makes sure that we are safe, and, most importantly, makes sure that we are back in our heads and feeling alright in the aftermath. Gotta love that kind, considerate Hero, whether he comes with whips or not.♥

Del Carmen writes erotica. She's published stories with Penthouse, Ravenous Romance and Cleis Press. Carmen is currently working on a new romance with a sexy BDSM Hero.



**REVIEW: “READING SEX: THE POWER OF THE ROMANCE NOVEL IN 2017” AT
MCNALLY JACKSON BOOKS
BY ALEXIS DARIA**



At the end of June, McNally Jackson Books held their first romance event, “Reading Sex: The Power of the Romance Novel in 2017.” The event featured authors Sarah MacLean (A SCOT IN THE DARK), Zoraida Córdova (LABYRINTH LOST), and Tessa Bailey (TOO HOT TO HANDLE). Thanks to outreach, more independent bookstores in NYC are giving attention and space to romance. In the last year or so, I’ve attended events at stores such as WORD in Brooklyn and Jersey City, two Book Culture locations uptown, The Strand, and now McNally Jackson. With the romance community turning out in droves to support these events, readers and authors are showing that there is a market for romance in NYC, and we will support your bookstore if you make an effort to support the genre. Overall, the McNally Jackson event was

fun and positive, with engaging speakers. By my count, there were at least sixty people in attendance, with standing room only, and the authors stuck around afterward to chat and sign books. During the moderated discussion, they discussed romance as a genre, writing good sex scenes, and made lots of book recommendations, which I’ve included in a list at the end.

First, the moderator brought up the subject of hope in romance novels. Zoraida said she doesn't like reading the sad parts anymore. Sarah countered that she does like the sad parts, but it’s the romance that keeps her fired up. Zoraida admitted that romance as a genre is often more hopeful than some of the YA she reads. And Tessa added that romance creates a sense of community at a time when we worry, “What else are they going to take away from us?” Romance forms communities where people lift each other up.

The conversation took off on its own from there. Tessa noted that romance gives women more agency around sex, and the empowerment and vocabulary to talk about and ask for what they want. Sarah thinks that's why the older romances were so subversive. The day after Election Day, she was 275 pages into her latest release, THE DAY OF THE DUCHESS, and she hated the hero so much that she had to start over.

Zoraida said she wants to write characters people can relate to, characters who are rough, but soft on the inside, like her. With one of her books, someone told her to “make the girl more likable,” and she was like, “*Why? Someone will relate to this character.*”

Then the moderator brought up a new topic and asked, “What are some of your deal breakers as readers?” Sarah’s first response was cheating, but then she laughed and said she has since put it in a book, and admitted she reads everything in romance. Tessa agreed that cheating had been a deal

breaker, but as she's gotten older, things that used to be unacceptable to her no longer are, such as heroes who do drugs. Zoraida never thought she'd read about a dirty priest, but she did, and recommended *Priest* by Sierra Simone) As long as characters are fully developed, she said, she'll give it a chance.

The general consensus was that even something labeled a “deal breaker” could work in the hands of a good writer. Sarah noted that real people have real problems. She included Lilah Pace's "Asking for It" in her list of romance recommendations for *Cosmo*, but they cut it because it has consensual non-consent. She originally resisted reading it because that was a deal breaker for her, but now she says, "it's one of the best *on the edge*."



Alexis and Zoraida

The next question posed by the moderator is one most romance writers are familiar with: How do you write a good sex scene? Zoraida answered that she tries not to make it like a porn a college student would read. It should be exciting, but not unrealistic. Her level is how comfortable she is putting it on the page, since her dad reads her books. I have to note here that the first book in Zoraida's new "Happy Endings Series" is called STRIPPED, and inspired by Magic Mike XXL. She's releasing it as Zoey Castile in September 2018 from Kensington. She said she's had the most fun writing those sex scenes.

Sarah said sex scenes are hardest for her to write and she hates them, but since she writes chronologically, she can't skip over them to add them in later. Sex has to matter, she said. It has to be relevant to the characters, increase the conflict, and change the characters.

Tessa said she writes what turns her on, which is really filthy dialogue. According to her friends who are online dating, she says men aren't saying what they want. It's sexy to her to have the men say what's on their mind and not make the woman guess. She thinks it's okay to want to feel objectified in that situation. Sarah adds that dirty talk is constant consent, and romance is a safe space for exploring kinks.

Jumping off of this topic, the moderator asked if these authors ever heard from readers who are unhappy with these scenes. Tessa said, yes, and sometimes readers don't like how the hero talked to the heroine in a specific scene. But that's fine. Sarah notes that one-star "too much dirty talk" reviews are the best way to sell a book. She received a review that said, "his head was under her skirts the whole time."

Before they took questions from the audience, the moderator asked for book and TV recommendations. (I have to add that it was so cool to see romance authors gushing over other romance authors. Sarah even carries around postcards with her recs printed on them.) There were a lot of books mentioned, so I'll include those in a list below. As for TV, Zoraida and Sarah both recommended *Harlots* on Hulu, a show about rival brothels with women at the center of the story. At one point they were both screaming, "It's so good!" Zoraida said it has POC and LGBT characters in a historical setting. Sarah added that it's created by women and has a mostly female cast. (I know what I'm binge-watching next.)

"Who are you reading now" answers from Sarah MacLean, Zoraida Cordova, and Tessa Bailey:

- A HOPE DIVIDED (The Loyal League #2) by Alyssa Cole
- HAVEN by Rebekah Weatherspoon
- HARD HITTER by Serena Bowen
- HATE TO LOVE YOU by Alisha Rai
- OPEN HEARTS by Eve Dangerfield
- THE SOLDIER'S SCOUNDREL by Cat Sebastian
- HER BEST WORST MISTAKE by Sarah Mayberry
- ACUTE REACTIONS by Ruby Lang
- ASKING FOR IT by Lilah Pace
- THE SCANDAL OF IT ALL by Sophie Jordan
- IMMORTALS AFTER DARK by Kresley Cole
- HOT COP by Sierra Simone and Laurelin Paige

In summary, support your local indie bookstores, especially the ones who are supporting romance!♥

Alexis Daria's debut contemporary romance, TAKE THE LEAD, is a 2017 Golden Heart® finalist and will be released in Fall 2017 from SMP Swerve. On Sunday evenings, Alexis co-hosts #RWchat, a weekly Twitter chat for romance writers. She also serves as PRO Liaison for the New York City chapter of RWA, and is represented by Sarah E. Younger from Nancy Yost Literary Agency. Alexis loves social media, and you can find her as @alexisdaria on Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, @alexidarial on Facebook, and follow her blog, alexisdaria.com.



ALEXIS, KATE, STACEY & TESSA

**STREET TEAMS: YOUR BOOK LAUNCH SECRET WEAPON
BY MISTY BELLER**

Street Team, Launch Team, Fan Club—the name varies, but the idea is still a great one!

What am I talking about, you ask?

A launch team is basically a group of readers who are ready and willing (and eager!) to get the word out on the street about an author's books. When I think of my launch team, I think of my first readers, my inside circle, my front lines, my most enthusiastic fans.

**What does a launch team do?**

Members are given ARC copies and asked to read the book before release. From there, the role may vary depending on the author and team members, but the common theme and single most important job of a launch team member is to post reviews—on Amazon, Goodreads, and anywhere else the book is available! Reviews help jump-start both Amazon's algorithms and reader confidence in a book, so I work hard to help my books gain at least twenty-five reviews within the first few weeks.

Beyond reviews, some ideas for the launch team are to:

- Talk about the books on social media sites.
- Blog about the books.
- Direct people to author's website.
- Write a review for their local newspaper.
- Purchase copies to give away as Christmas and birthday gifts.
- Pin the cover and book memes to Pinterest.
- Share favorite quotes from the book on social media.
- Suggest the book on reading forums, like those on Goodreads.
- Like and share the book trailer on YouTube or Vimeo.
- Donate a copy to a local library or church library.
- Suggest the author's latest book to a book club.
- And the list can go on!

Who makes a great launch team member?

Readers who have read and are excited about the author's books, and want to share that excitement within their sphere of influence. Enthusiasm trumps all. Time availability is important, too!

Often, authors tend to lean toward asking other authors to be on their launch team. After all, only a compatriot would understand the importance of the role, right? In my experience, though, readers tend to be more enthusiastic launch team members, eagerly reading the book and posting reviews as soon as possible. While it's certainly fine to have both, when I open my launch team to new members, I try to post the memo where my readers will see it.



So how does an author find launch team members?

I recommend having a form on your website that asks basic questions, such as what genres the potential candidate likes to read, and whether they've read any of your books already. You could also go one step further and ask for the link to one of the reviews they've posted for your books. How much or how little is your choice!

You can see an example form at my website. When I was actively seeking to grow my team, this page was front and center on my site menu. Now, I have it tucked in as part of the 'About' page so it can be found by readers who are really interested.

Once you have that form in place, you can direct people there from a variety of places:

- Call-out on social media.
- Post the request on your blog.
- Send an email to your list. (Another advantage of growing your reader list! Just make sure you screen respondents to find those who really want to help with your launches, not just receive free books.)
- A note in the back of your eBooks, if you're feeling ambitious!

What should you give your launch team in return for their help?

Free ARCs (advance reader copies) are a given.

For traditionally published authors, your publisher probably already has a standard format for distributing ARCs. Some larger publishers send paperback copies directly to those on your launch team, and only need you to provide names and addresses for each person.

Other publishers will provide you with a PDF or eBook files to distribute to your team. Still others use services like NetGalley to send out ARCs. Make sure you know what your publisher is planning and what they need from you, BEFORE you contact your launch team about a new release.

For indie authors, there are great FREE programs out there to help authors convert and distribute ARC files in formats that make it easy for your launch team members to read. Calibre is a useful (free) software to convert a Word document to mobi files (for Kindles) and epub files (for iBooks, Nook, and most other ereaders).

BookFunnel.com is a helpful resource to distribute the ereader files to your team. It makes the process to download the file onto their ereader as simple as possible, and BookFunnel's customer service is top notch.

Beyond ARCs, have fun with it! Here are some fun freebies to share with your team, if you have the opportunity and/or means:

- Insider info, such as the first opportunity to see cover art for your upcoming releases.
- Let them help name characters or choose settings.

- I like to give my team the choice to receive either eBook or paperback copies (signed with a note to them).
- Book swag created for your author brand, such as bookmarks, mugs printed with your book cover, etc.
- Christmas ornaments engraved with your author or book name. Etsy.com has some creative options here!
- Generally speaking, the more you connect with your team, the more they'll want to promote your books.



A word of caution above, Amazon's review requirements are strict about giving gifts in exchange for reviews, so you'll want to be careful to avoid any language about 'requiring reviews' in exchange for any of the benefits received by being on your launch team.

Make it easy to share your book on social media

People are more likely to share your book when you make it easy for them! There are a couple of ways you can do this:

- The simplest way is to create several Twitter and Facebook posts that people can copy and post to their respective accounts. (Make sure you include a buy link for your book!) You can simply include these in an email to your launch team, or paste them on a Word document you send out.
- A more sophisticated method would be to create a share page on your website. Using a tool like sharelinkgenerator.com, you can create prewritten posts where people only need to click to post your message on any of the social media platforms you include. You can even add memes or other images for easy posting. People are more likely to share your message when you make it possible with only a click or two.

Tips on Interacting with your Launch Team

- Know your goals for the team and be clear up front about expectations. Do you want them to focus on reviews only, or is social media sharing important to you?
- Send ARCs to your team at least 2-3 months before release, or as early as possible.
- Include links for where to post reviews in your emails to your list. Don't forget Goodreads!
- Even if you haven't made a big deal about your team sharing on social media, make it easy for those who choose to do so!♥
-

Misty M. Beller writes Christian historical romance, and is a hybrid author of eleven novels, as well as a non-fiction book for authors, HOW TO MARKET A BOOK RELEASE. With over ten years working in professional project management and marketing, Misty uses her experience in the corporate world to develop best practices in her writing and book marketing efforts. It is her passion to help other authors on this same journey. Misty teaches courses and workshops at writers' conferences around the U.S., educating authors on effective book marketing approaches and helping them apply that knowledge to their own books. Visit her at www.theambitiousauthor.com.





ABOUT PAN (PUBLISHED AUTHOR NETWORK)

The purpose of the Published Authors Network (PAN) is to establish within the RWA framework a network of communication and support to effectively promote and protect the interests of published romance authors; to open channels of communication between those romance authors and other publishing industry professionals; and to encourage professionalism on all levels and in all relationships within the publishing industry.

To be eligible for General PAN Membership: RWA General or Honorary members in good standing should have earned at least \$1,000 on a single novel or novella that meets the definition of Romance Fiction.

To be eligible for Provisional PAN Membership: RWA General or Honorary members in good standing should have: (1) contracted for the publication of a novel or novella for an advance of at least \$1,000, but said work is not yet commercially available ("Option One"); or (2) published a novel or novella, but not yet earned \$1,000 ("Option Two"). Works offered through Predatory Publishing companies shall not qualify.♥



About PRO

The purpose of the PRO Community of Practice is to establish within RWA a network of communication and support to effectively promote and protect the interests of romance writers in the areas between manuscript completion and PAN eligibility.

To help members reach the next level, PRO focuses on the business side of writing rather than craft. This program is available to any active General or Honorary member who: (1) is not PAN-eligible and (2) has one complete original work of romance fiction of at least 20,000 words, or multiple complete original works of romance fiction which combine for a total of at least 20,000 words.♥

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