



MERMAID TALES



President's Message

by Loretta Rogers

Everything we do, from learning how to create believable characters, to finding ways to put characters in strong, sustained conflict, to motivating characters to fight their way to the end is about giving the reader the emotional ride he or she paid for.

As I take my daily walks with my two dogs and listen to the chirping birds and look at new life budding on bushes and trees, I am inspired by the romance of nature.

Romance is defined as the largest and best-selling genre in fiction today. As authors plying our trade, we can pay attention to that definition or ignore it.

We can't always choose what happens in our writing careers. We can't control whether or not a book hits a best-seller list, or whether our publisher throws advertising dollars behind a book, or whether an editor will like what we've written. But we can choose to write the best story we're capable of writing each time we sit down to work.

Brad Paisley said, "Tomorrow, is the first blank page of a 365 page book. Write a good one." I don't know about you, but I like knowing that spring is in the air and that romance continues to abound. I like knowing that I have

With the rosy bloom of spring in the air, romance is also blooming. Industry officials tout the romance genre as resilient in this economic malaise. So let's celebrate this good news as a signal that readers want our stories of happily ever after, and that publishers continue to serve the romance market.

I once heard an editor say that readers pick your current novel if you impress them on the first page, and they'll buy your next novel if you wow them on the last page

That piece of advice resonated deeply with me. I keep those words in the back of my mind when sitting at the computer fleshing out an idea for a new story.

We romance authors have a monumental task. We don't leave readers filled with dismay or grief.

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Editor's Message

Officers and Members List and Committee Chairs

Romance Writers of America
14615 Benfer Road
Houston, TX 77069

an organization such a Sunshine State Romance Authors to keep me inspired.

SSRA will continue to support the efforts of its members by offering educational programs to help in the pursuit of a writing career with viable publishers.

Now, go out and get inspired by the rosy bloom of spring. You never know--the book you write may be the next best seller.



KUDOS AND CONTRACTS

Congratulations to Flossie Benton Rogers! Her first book, *Wythfae Runes*, published by Secret Cravings, is now available. She signed a 7 book contract with them.

Cowgirl Courage, a Western by Loretta Rogers, was released on December 11, published by Avalon/Amazon. It was subcontracted by Brilliance Audio for Libraries and will be distributed to seven different countries.

Barry Denham was a finalist and fifth place winner in the contemporary division of the Golden Acorn Contest sponsored by the Charter Oak Romance Writers, Inc. RWA #194.

Jessica Nelson is a nominee for *Romantic Times* magazine's Reviewer's Choice Award for her Harlequin Love Inspired Historical *Love on the Range*. Winners will be announced in the June Issue of *RT*.

Anna Small's Historical Romance, *In the Arms of the Earl*, published by Wild Rose Press, will be released sometime in June 2013.

Dylan Newton has received a contract from Wild Rose Press for her Paranormal Romance Novella, *Any Witch Way*.

Loretta Rogers has received a contract from The Wild Rose Press for a historical Western Romance with Paranormal elements.

Loretta also has a contemporary military romance, *Falling in Love Again*, releasing in June.



Mermaidology: Helpful Terms for Writers

(The terms from this issue come from *Manuscript Makeover*, by Elizabeth Lyon.)

Riff-Writing: A form of free writing that is used in revision. The purpose is to encourage the imagination to solve a particular problem in the writer's manuscript, for example, to deepen characterization.

Five Stages of Dramatic Structure:

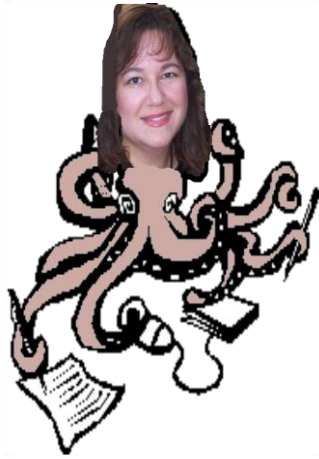
- 1) Character with a problem.
- 2) Complications occur and conflict is magnified.
- 3) The crises end in a climax
- 4) The story problem is resolved.
- 5) The main characters learn something about themselves.

Viewpoint Slips: Changing the point of view during a scene.

Hovering Viewpoint: Character lacks the substance of sensory experience and direction as he moves through the story, giving him the appearance of hovering like a ghost.

Abrupt Viewpoint Changes: The writer is missing the transitions that will smoothly carry the reader to the next point-of-view.

Librarian's Lair



by Anna Small

For this installment of the Librarian's Lair, we're going to talk about not one book, but hundreds! No, you don't need to mortgage your house or sell your firstborn (though that may be tempting).

We are going to discuss how you can improve your own writing by looking at novels in your local bookstore, or by checking out free "sample pages" from novels on websites like Amazon or publishers' websites. Whatever you prefer to do, make sure the books are new releases of the past few months or so.

This will probably be the most fun homework you've ever had! Visit your neighborhood bookstore or go online. Search for books in your primary genre. In other words, if your work in progress is mostly a contemporary romance, select

those books. If you cross multiple genres, such as futuristic/paranormal/historical or whatever combination, you might have to narrow it down. Your future editor will also thank you for this.

Now, here's where the learning comes in. Select about 10 titles and read the blurbs on the backs of the books (or if you're doing this online, the blurbs are usually on the main purchase page of that book). Examine how the blurbs capture the essence of the story, and what themes are consistent. For example, they will usually mention the names of the H/H and what insurmountable problem they have to overcome. Sometimes the blurbs end with a question to entice the reader.

Check the page count and compare the books you've chosen. Will your 600 page novel fit in with that publisher's other books? Or are you short a few pages? Gently flip the pages and see how often there are chapter breaks. Every few pages? Every twenty or more? Are there lots of little scenes within chapters or one scene per chapter?

Prologues and epilogues can also be explored here. Many historical romances have them, but study the books you've chosen. If the majority of them do or do not have prologues, that can be a guideline. You can also read what kind of information or backstory was provided in a prologue and how

long or how short it is. They may also differ by publisher. Some like them, some don't.

If you're looking at physical books, write down the publishers. Many publishers have more than one "imprint" that tells the reader what kind of book they are buying. For example, no Harlequin fan could confuse their Blaze Line with a Loveswept. Within particular lines might be page counts and other stylistic features. Last, and this is probably the fun part, read the first paragraph, the first page, and the first chapter.



"Examine how the blurbs capture the essence of the story, and what themes are consistent."



See if the first paragraph makes you want to keep reading. Ask yourself what elements made you want to keep reading or not. Was there a good opening hook? How does the chapter end? Is the writer's "voice" engaging or dull? When are the main characters introduced? How many characters are in the first scene? Whose point of view are you in?

How are dialogue tags used, if at all? How does the author show her

characters' personalities? Are they likable or not? Why or why not? Take a notebook with you and write down what you've observed. Then, go back to your own novel and see what you might be missing or what could be stronger. Until next time, keep your tails flapping!



Flotsam and Jetsam

MEDIA LIBRARY---Please bring any books or magazines you wish to donate to the media library to the next meeting. Anna Small, our librarian, is ready to add them to her growing list. If you're in need of a book, the list can be viewed on the SSRA loop under "Files." Please contact her with any questions: annasmallbooks@yahoo.com

SSRA WEBSITE---Remember to visit www.sunshinestateromanceauthors.com and enjoy our informative and entertaining chapter website. You can get the latest news about coming events and hear about your fellow members' latest successes.

Cheryl Charles, our amazing web/blog master, is happy to report that the website continues to grow and get more traffic. If anyone wants to receive an email each time a post is made on the site, they can follow SSRA by signing up on the website at the bottom of any page.

Welcome to our new members Marian Fox and Rhonda Kauffman. Rhonda has also graciously volunteered to be our new historian.

The next meeting is April 27. Multi-published Anna Small will be teaching us about how to dress our characters in historical novels. She will also tell us how to incorporate research into historical novels without sounding like an encyclopedia. We look forward to learning from this talented author.

On March 15, 2013, the State of Florida issued a Certificate of Corporation to SSRA. our chapter is now officially, Sunshine State Romance Authors, Inc. RWA #225. We are proud of this accomplishment because it gives our group the distinction of a professional writing organization.

ASK GRAMMY

Punctuation, Grammar, Colonoscopies

Dear Writers,

I received a disturbing email from a gentleman who was apprehended at a recent conference. While attending a cold read, he was lucky enough to get his two pages picked by an editor to be read aloud.

Unfortunately, while still reading the first page, the editor turned crimson, reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a whistle. He put it to his mouth and made one short and then two long blows. The blasts were shrill and disturbing and as all of you should know by now, is the writer's morose code for PUNCTUATION VIOLATION 132. This summoned the Punctuation Police (PP), the agency that I founded in 2011.

The offender was carried away and forced to correct his offending grammar violation by writing it (with squeaky chalk) on a blackboard 100 times. He violated a simple rule, which makes his day of shame even more humiliating. Watch and learn:

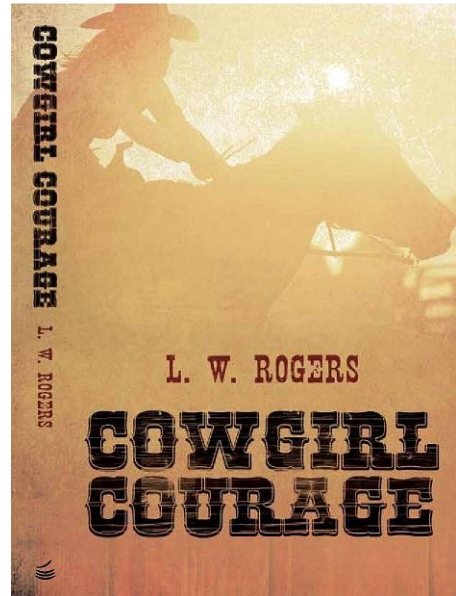
IT'S OR ITS

The **ONLY** time you use **IT'S** is for a contraction, in other words, **IT IS**. That's it. For example, "It's (it is) a sad day in America when we misuse an apostrophe."

"A computer charges best with its power cord attached."

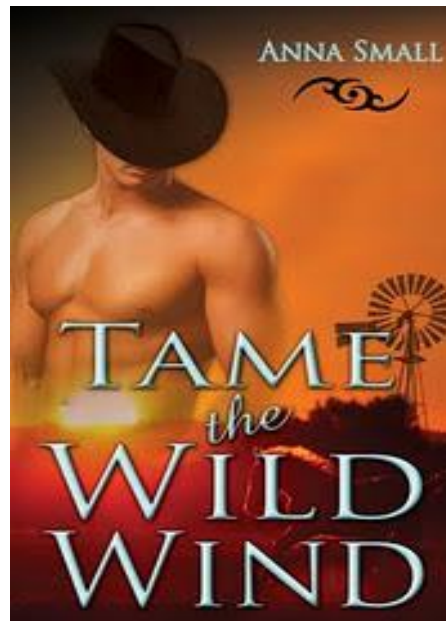
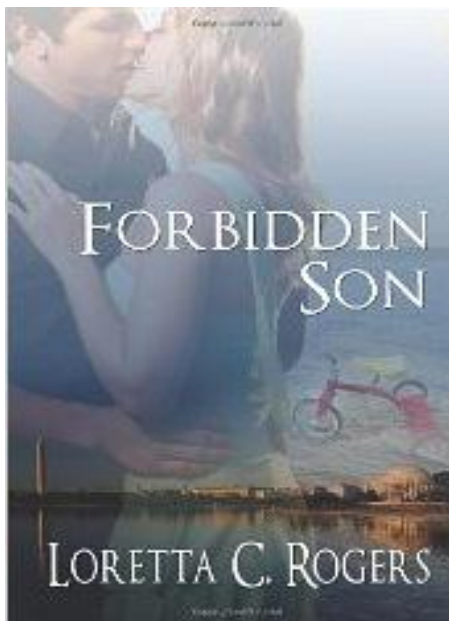
Be a law abiding writer. Obey Punctuation Violation 132.

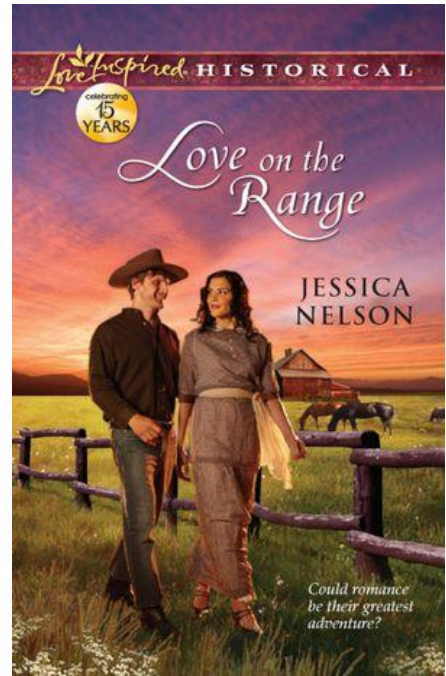
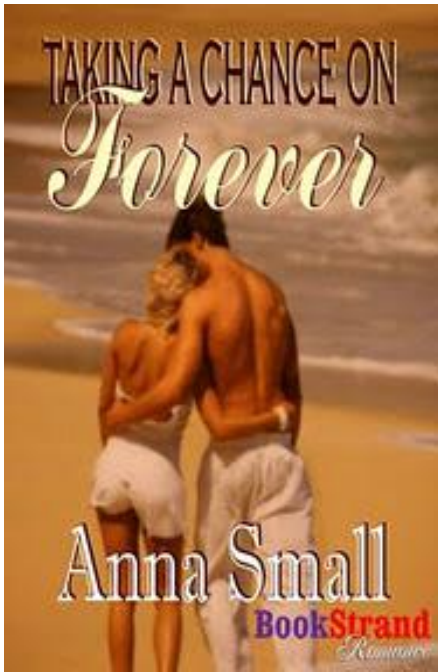
Making a Splash



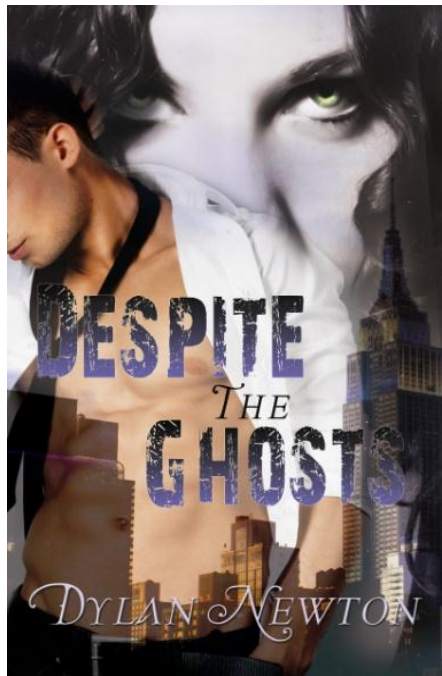
Congrats to Flossie Benton Rogers on the release of her first book!

AVAILABLE NOW!





Congrats to all of
our
Published Authors!
You inspire us.





**Hemingway's Home
In
Key West**

by Susan Bridenstine

Writers are told to write what they know. A visit to the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum attests to the fact that Ernest Hemingway did exactly that.

His enduring presence is felt at 907 Whitehead Street in Key West, where he and his second of four wives, Pauline Pfeiffer Hemingway, lived from 1931 to 1940. The serene studio, transformed from a carriage house, the lush tropical gardens, and the orderly home appear as if the Hemingways are traveling abroad and may return any moment.



As I lingered amid the home and its tranquil surroundings, I considered the legacy Hemingway left behind. One, I'm sure, he could have never imagined. His high profile lifestyle and writing influenced millions of people internationally, not only as a journalist, Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winning author and decorated soldier, but as a goodwill ambassador and compassionate man.

He actively sought to taste life and experience the struggle of mankind first-hand. As a result of his pursuit, his writing revealed detailed insights on boxing, bullfighting, safaris, war, love, and fishing. He transported readers to another place and time using the objective style of writing he developed as a journalist.

Landmarked by the commanding Key West Lighthouse across the street, the house was designed and built by Asa Tift, a wealthy marine architect, merchantman, salvage wrecker and captain. Tift utilized his architectural background in the design and construction of the Spanish Colonial style house which has withstood several hurricanes, attesting to his skill. He chose the second highest point in Key West on which to build in order to utilize the limestone dug for an unprecedented basement in the construction of the house. It is believed that slaves then hand cut the stone which was used for the walls. Construction of the home was completed in 1851.

Within a few years of taking residence, yellow fever took the lives of Tift's two sons and his wife, Anna. He never remarried and lived in the home until his death in 1889.

Pauline Hemingway fell in love with the abandoned property despite its sad state of disrepair. In 1931, her uncle bought the property for \$8,000 back taxes and gave it as a wedding gift to Pauline and Ernest. Renovation became their first order of

(continued on next pg.)

business.

One notable feature of the property is the enormous in-ground swimming pool dug in rock-hard coral in 1937. Summoned to cover the

Spanish Civil War as a correspondent, Hemingway left Pauline to oversee the completion of the pool. When he returned home and learned that the cost of the pool had escalated to \$20,000, he reminded Pauline that the house and property had cost a mere \$8,000. He reportedly gave her a penny, saying, "Pauline, you've spent all but my last penny, so you might as well have that." When visiting, if you look closely, a penny is seen in the cement near the pool.

Not to be ignored are the six-toed cats, bearing names of famous people, who roam freely throughout the property and house. I was told Bela Lugosi is alive and well and living in the basement. Many of the felines are said to be descendants of Snowball, a white polydactyl given to Hemingway. Home to approximately 40 cats, the estate also has a cat cemetery where Mr. Betty Davis, James Joyce, Mark Twain, John Wayne, to name a few, are laid to rest.

Hemingway obtained one of the urinals from Sloppy Joe's Bar during a renovation and had it placed on his property to remind him where his money had gone.

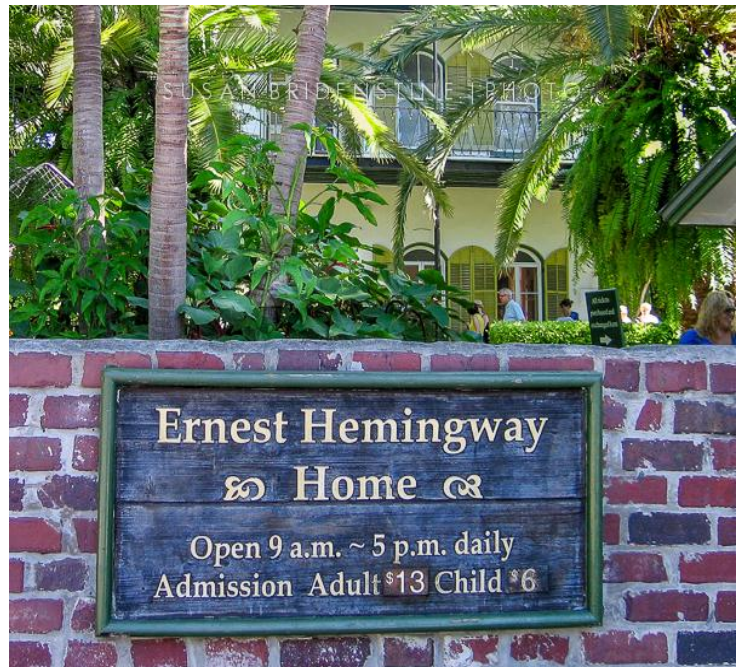
Inside the house, multitudes of photographs and paintings depict Hemingway's legendary life as well as his acquaintances and friends, some of whom he fashioned into characters in his stories.

If you're seeking inspiration, a visit here is sure to motivate your imagination.

To get the most from a visit, you'll want to take one of the guided tours, after which you're free to linger as long as you like in the garden, home, book store, studio and property where you too may find

inspiration. Each colorful guide offers a unique tour, making the visit a memorable experience.

The Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum is a Registered National Historic Landmark, a Literary Landmark and recorded at the Library of Congress as a Historic American Building. Hours of operation are from 9 am to 5pm, 365 days a year. Further information is available via e mail at: info@hemingwayhome.com by phone at: 305-294-1136 or visit their website at: HemingwayHome.com.



Butt Glue



by Jennifer Taylor

The other day I picked up a new notebook. It’s everything I’m not: pink, dainty and organized. It’s feminine looking enough to remind me that “I enjoy being a girl.”

It’s small enough for me to shove in my purse in case I get an epiphany-on-the-go. Who says I won’t come up with a solution to my plot problem while shopping for toilet cleaner?

Best of all, it’s organized into three sections, which I vow will help me juggle my never-ending ideas. I can organize the sections like this: one for my current PYM ideas, one for last year’s PYM (this year’s critique partner WIP), and one for this year’s PYM.

Then, at the end of each day, I will transcribe these ideas into my computer in the proper file. The day I began using this notebook would be “a changing day in my life,” as Dr. Phil says.

As I fondled this piece of perfection in a dreamlike state, I read a note on the back cover. It says: “If you experience any issues, please call 866--***--****.”

Wow. I laughed for several minutes and then wondered: What did this mean? What kind of notebook issues would necessitate a call to this notebook company?

As far as I can tell, it’s a relatively harmless notebook, free of explosives or knife-like edges.

There are no loose wires, and the paper is perforation-free. Those simple instructions nagged at me for a month. “If you experience any issues . . .”

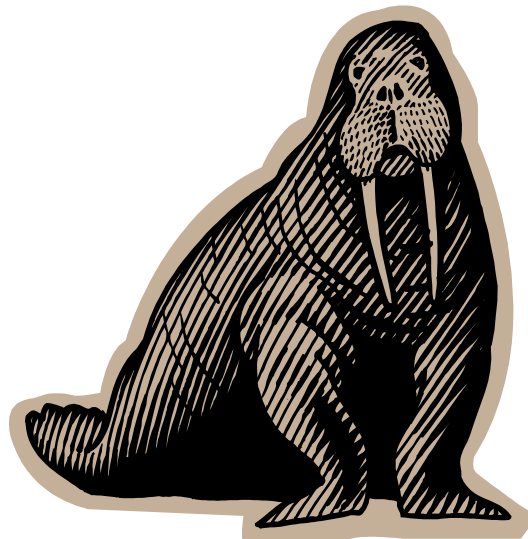
Aha. I saw myself calling the 866 number: “Hello? I am experiencing issues:”

- 1) “I have a paper cut.”
- 2) “Help! I can’t read my own writing.”
- 3) “Since I started using this notebook, I’ve had crippling writer’s block—what amount of compensation can I expect from you?”

Maybe I should call them. The urge to hearken back to my preteen years and make a prank call is mighty, but I continue to wrestle it down. I could make a reporter-like call and inquire about those “issues,” but it’s way more fun to speculate.

Plus, now I have something else on which I can blame my lapses of butt glue:

“The notebook did it.”



What is Author Intrusion? by Loretta C. Rogers

By definition, author intrusion is anything which the writer does that interrupts the story for the reader.

Ask yourself this question about your current work-in-progress: What character is in every scene and on every page? It doesn't matter what genre you're writing--romance, historical, contemporary, literary, commercial fiction, paranormal. Even an omniscient POV book with tons of head-hopping has a character who is in every scene and on every page and that character is **you--the author**.

Author intrusion comes when writers espouse their political views, personal opinions, or pet peeves into the work in progress.

So-called "author intrusion" is when a writer inserts something into the book which doesn't feel like it fits. This can happen in narrative or through dialogue. But usually it comes in the form of an opinion on an emotionally or politically charged subject that isn't directly attributable to any character in the scene, and is often written in a style that seems directed toward the reader.

Or, to look at intrusions in a slightly different way, consider

them places where the writer hasn't sufficiently covered h/her tracks. In fiction, any time the

reader sees a trace of the writer imposed upon the story world, that writer has intruded. In other words, stepped into a place h/she doesn't belong.

Author intrusion not only upsets the rhythms of story, it upsets the characters who must adapt to the anomaly, and most importantly, these intrusions upset the readers.

If one character starts spouting off in favor of the writer's cause, how will the other characters respond--even if the topic has nothing to do with these characters or the story plot?

A tip to remember about intruders is that they are not welcome. Would you rather your readers were encouraged or emotionally moved by your story or ticked off because you plopped your ideals into the middle of it?

People read fiction for the characters' stories, for the make-believe that they can imagine is real, to be entertained, to escape the rigors of their own difficult situations. Readers don't come to novels for a writer's opinions.

Author intrusion can be difficult for writers to see because we're used to our own opinions and knowledge; it's part of who we are and we don't usually see

anything wrong with the way we think. Seeing our opinions in others doesn't jar us the way it would a reader.

So how do we writers avoid falling into the author intrusion trap?

- First we must separate ourselves from our stories. This is the place to *get thyself out of the way* and allow the characters to take control.
- Give yourself the distance I mention above by putting the manuscript aside for a time. When you get away from the manuscript, you create the distance you need to view the story with a new set of eyes or perhaps the way a reader would view it.
- Listen to your critique partners or beta readers. If they point out author intrusion, then trust them and edit out the offending intrusion.

Other examples to eliminate author intrusion:

- Fancy words, cheap words, slang language that you would use, but not your characters.

- Knowledge you have, but your character doesn't possess.
- Copycats- characters who sound like the writer. Example: a man who sounds too feminine (if author is a woman), or a woman who sounds too masculine (if the author is a man).
- Phrases or physical gestures the writer would use, but not the character.
- Information about mindset, worldviews, habits/customs common to the writer's era, but unknown to the character in the story.
- Buzz words known only to the author, but characters have no knowledge of them.
- Archaic language used inappropriately for the character's time-period.
- Overly long or flowery sentences not otherwise used by a character.

Author intrusion can be subtle or blatantly obvious:

- Every character shares the writer's political, religious, or social point of views, prejudices.

When this type of intrusion happens, the author has taken away the character's independence and created an author's puppet with the author pulling the strings.

- When a writer has researched a topic or issue to the point it reads like an encyclopedia, but delivers this information via the character.

Keep in mind that familiarity and general knowledge are not equal to specialized knowledge. A time-traveler going to the past

might be able to talk about the wonders of the future, but not be able to explain how those wonders work or how they were invented. A character can own a car and not know how it runs. Author intrusion can come through omniscient point of view:

- When the author is off-stage and uses narrative to describe or tell about an event or issue that the character cannot possibly see or hear.

Anytime a reader can see the writer's word choices: getting preachy, or teaching, or setting details that overwhelm the reader (because the writer couldn't hold back after researching for days), then the writer has allowed 'self' to replace the character(s). This intrusion distracts and often jars readers away from the plot and draws them toward the author. Continuous author intrusion may also lead to readers putting the book down and never picking it up again; and may even dissuade the reader from buying more of that author's books.

A last word about author intrusion:

- Remove traces of yourself (e.g. author intrusion) by replacing your words with the characters' words and phrases common to and appropriate for the characters.
- Eliminate knowledge that only you (the writer) possess, but not the characters.
- Give characters their own personalities, strong and independent enough to stand against the author's will and interest.
- Use setting details to color and enrich a scene, not drown it under facts and unnecessary 'telling' details that do not relate to the story (no matter how fascinating you think they are.)

Story does not write itself, characters do not create their personalities. As the writer, your hands, heart and mind, will be all over your writing. Just avoid allowing readers to see the evidence of your touch.



**WRITING A PYM NOVEL:
IS IT WORTH IT?**



by Carol Megge

The experience of writing a Prod Your Muse novel can have many results, some expected and some unexpected.

This is what I learned: I learned a lot about how internal conflict can drive a character to drive a plot. I learned a lot about developing a character and how to have a character change. I learned about active verbs, not passive. I worked on point of view, and avoided head-hopping. I worked hard on imagery, but I knew as I was writing that I needed more work on that. I learned to type fast, get the pages out, and still think as I was typing about the quality of the work.

The big unexpected result was that I could do this. When I wrote "The End" it gave me a satisfaction that blew my mind. I was a different person, an author. Nothing could stop me now.

The next unexpected result was that, even though I had done

this, written a novel, I was not finished. Revision loomed ahead. I still have so much to learn. There are problems with what I wrote, and I have to face them. Still, I have the thought in mind that I can do this. I can learn and make it better.

So how did I actually do it? What was the process? The commitment to write 65,000 words in five months was easy to make. Lots of time, right? Oh yeah. You know some of the things they say about time: Time is perishable and irreplaceable and when it's gone, it's gone. It's not how much time you have, but how you use it. There's enough time in the world for anything, provided it's your priority. All true.

I'm a slow writer. If I write only one 250 word page an hour, I'll need 260 hours to write 65,000 words. At twenty hours a week, that's a little over three months. Five months is plenty of time. Of course, I had to spend weeks thinking about what I was going to write. I had to settle on a time and place. I had to do some research. I had to decide on a beginning situation and a probable ending. It all took time, and I hadn't even started writing yet.

I wrote a chapter. I got it critiqued. I wrote another chapter. I got it critiqued. I dawdled along for a summer. I went away on vacation. I missed

the plotting workshop, but worked out one anyway, and ended up writing a list of thirty-three scenes that would get me to a happy ending.

By now it was October, with a due date of December 8th. I still had to pump out 40,000 words. I started spending more hours actually typing. I refigured almost daily how many hours I needed for how many pages. I learned to type faster, meaning mostly that I stopped taking breaks. My husband offered to wash dishes, and stopped asking me if I wanted to watch TV with him. One day I wrote 5,000 words. The end was approaching and I did not want to be a failure. I could do this. And I did.

I was hyper at the small ceremony we had to honor the people who completed the task. I was on top of the world. I am an author.



2013 Prod Your Muse Contest

In 9 months (from March 1 to December 20) SSRA member participants are challenged to write a 65,000 word novel. The reward at the contest's end is the rough draft of a novel.

Dylan Newton

"My PYM is a paranormal/time-travel romance and I'd like to tell you that I've done thousands of words this month...but I'd be lying. I am at 9,862--which is roughly around the same point I started with at the beginning of the PYM contest.

I did refine some scenes and took some notes on plot changes I wanted to make. However, most of my month was dedicated to first and final galley proofs for my upcoming novella, "Any Witch Way" as well as extensive revisions to my novel I'm querying right now on a female werewolf. Oh, and SSRA presentations on query letters and synopsis creation...

But, as Scarlett O'Hara says, 'Tomorrow is another day.'

I will make the goal, never fear!"



Barry Denham

"I am at around 11,000 words. I have been back and forth on settling which way I want to go on this story. I have started/stopped at least three times. All toll, I have written about 70000 words, but scrapped all but the 11,000 on the new story which I started last weekend. Yes, I wrote 7000 words on one Saturday and one Sunday afternoon, the rest in one sitting since. I learned (with help from my friends in SSRA and my wife) that I was wasting a lot of time worrying about my work that's out there finaling in contests and sitting on editors' desks. I finally decided to forget about **Time for Raine** for the time being and get going on a true romance story, something I've skirted (no pun intended) around for over a year now. My PYM is probably going to end up a Contemporary Romance, pure and simple."

Loretta

"Even though I'm multi-published, I still need that kick in the 'uh-huh' to make me sit at the computer to meet my daily word count. PYM is that motivator. Sometimes it's difficult to meet copyedit deadlines for a contracted book, then have to switch gears to get back into the plot for my PYM WIP. Knowing I have a deadline looming over me gets my competitive nature into gear--even on days when I'd rather vacuum dust bunnies than try to figure out the next plot twists."

PROD YOUR MUSE 2013

Cheryl Charles

“PYM 2013 already started?!? Oops. Guess it's not going so well for me so far... ;-P
I will provide some words of encouragement / observations, however.

Prod Your Muse (PYM)

65,000 words

9+ months

42 weeks

294 days

That's 1548 words a Week or **221 words a Day**

By contrast,

National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo)

50,000 words

1 month

4 weeks

30 days

That's 11,669 words a Week or **1,667 words a Day**

To sum up:

| | |
|-----------|-------------------|
| PYM | 221 words a DAY |
| NANOWRIMO | 1,667 words a DAY |

Hemingway famously said he wrote 500 words a day. Flannery O'Connor said, 'I write only about two hours every day because that's all the energy I have, but I don't let anything interfere with those two hours, at the same time and the same place.' Thomas Wolfe said, 'I set myself a quota — ten pages a day, triple-spaced, which means about eighteen hundred words. If I can finish that in three hours, then I'm through for the day. I just close up the lunch box and go home — that's the way I think of it anyway. If it takes me twelve hours, that's too bad, I've got to do it.'

(Source: <http://flavorwire.com/193101/weird-writing-habits-of-famous-authors>)

Conclusion:

Prod Your Muse is TOTALLY DO-ABLE!

Now that I've probably geeked you out , I will belatedly begin my PYM 2013 journey and write 500 words today. That's more than necessary based on the calculations, but why not build in a buffer and / or finish early? Plus, you can't go wrong emulating Ernest Hemingway - at least where writing is concerned. Drinking, that's a different story...

Hope you're off to a great start for your PYM!”



Suspending Disbelief

by Loretta Rogers

Writing a novel is easy. Writing a good novel with believable characters and believable events is difficult. That's just the way it is. If it were easy, we'd all be writing best-selling, award-winning fiction.

When I critique novels for beginning writers or new writers who have received numerous rejection letters for their first novel, I very often find a major problem with the writer not **suspending disbelief**.

Before I get into the nuts and bolts of this very important writing term, it's important to know the definition. According to Urban Dictionary, Suspension of Disbelief is : "A term used in the context of entertainment, which can include reading, video games, television, and films. It refers to the reader/watcher's ability or desire (or both) to ignore, distort or underplay realism in order to feel more involved in the game, film, or book."

Are you confused? Don't be. It's really very simple. In more common terms, when we read paranormal/fantasy/sci-fi books such as any novel by Stephen King, or watch movies such as *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, or *Cowboys and Aliens*, we know these storylines aren't real, therefore we accept the make-believe elements for the sheer sake of enjoyment.

However, if you read Nicholas Sparks romance novels, Louie L'Amour westerns, or Mary Higgins Clark mysteries, we accept the story plot, the goals, motivations and conflicts of the central characters as realistic because of the way these authors have successfully suspended disbelief.

It doesn't matter what genre you write. Writing fiction is about drawing your readers into a world you created, making readers believe that world possibly exists. It's creating characters that people can relate to--root for, cry for, love 'em or hate 'em. It's shaping an imaginary world and imaginary characters into something real and believable.

The moment that one small bit of realism is out of place, people sit up and notice. Have you ever seen a

magician do a trick and notice the thin wire or the cables that make the assistant fly? The entire illusion is ruined.

What about in a non-paranormal book: have you ever read something the character said or did in an action scene, and said to yourself, "this is unbelievable; this would never happen?" Or, "she would never say that, or he wouldn't act that way?"

In either instance--movie or book--you've lost your audience.

Remember, the first and most important reader you must convince that you've suspended disbelief effectively is either an editor or an agent.

Suspension of disbelief helps your readers let go of reality and accept what you have to offer as the truth.

As a writer, it is your job to convince your readers to believe the action/crises would happen, that the dialogue is so convincing the reader feels the emotion. The reader must accept your characters are real and that they could possibly exist. It is your job to convince your readers that the events you write about could take place.

Details are the shadows that add depth to the written picture you paint. Without these vivid descriptions, without deep POV, without convincing dialogue, the mental images you are trying to create fall flat and lifeless, and therefore, do not suspend disbelief.

It is important to maintain that suspension of disbelief throughout the entire novel. Good novels illuminate reality even as they transcend it, allowing readers to find truth and humanity in worlds that are completely fabricated.

Again, no matter what type of novel you write--literary or commercial, romance or paranormal, historical or family saga--you'll need boundless creative energy and a commitment to suspend disbelief until you reach the last page and write "The End."

Editor's Message

There's a lot of wildlife swimming in the waters of SSRA these days. Members are getting their first novels critiqued and beta read. Other members are absorbing, rethinking those critiques and rewriting their first novels. Our more experienced members are hard at work with new books coming out, line edits, deadlines and demands from editors and publishers. Our monthly Pro-Be meetings teem with mentorship, ideas and enthusiasm.

How many of us are trying something we've never tried before? Most of us, I'd wager. For example, some of us are taking an extra hit of oxygen from that scuba tank as we plunge into the undiscovered territory of pitches, queries and synopses.

Our members are soaking up knowledge and learning from each other as fast as humanly possible. And here's another thing we all have in common: whether not-yet-published or multi-published, we all have something to contribute to our fellow members, based on our own uniqueness and a wealth of experience. Most of all, we share a special kind of courage, to try new things, to take a risk, to get out of our comfort zones. Taking a creative plunge can be like diving off the high dive--frightening but exhilarating.

So congratulations, Merms, for your courage--in sharing with each other, in working on behalf of our group, in learning something new, in working hard at your craft. Remember that the newsletter is a shark-free zone in which to practice getting your work out there. It's great training for meeting deadlines, communicating with an editor, and juggling multiple writing gigs. Share what you've been learning along the way. We need articles.

Thank you everyone who has contributed to SSRA's Mermaid Tales

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