



## Features

- 4 ~ Creating Extraordinary Writing from Ordinary Phrases
- 6 ~ Plotting the Romance: The Basics
- 9 ~ Welcome to My World: A World-Building Checklist

## Chapter Essentials

Sept. Speaker: Katherine Garbera	1
President's Corner	2
Meeting Minutes	3
Rising Star Awards	3
Spur Awards	3
RITA & Golden Heart Drawing	3
Great Expectations Contest	5
Volunteers Needed!	6
North Texas Two-Step Conference	11
Audio Library	12
BABS	12
Member News	12

# Heart to Heart

North Texas Romance Writers of America

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## HOW TO WRITE A WINNING SYNOPSIS

Join us Saturday, September 19, to hear **Katherine Garbera** talk about how to write a winning synopsis. She will also share her experience of being a successful Silhouette Desire author. Katherine Garbera is a strong believer in happily-ever-after. She's written more than 40 books and has been nominated for Romantic Times Book reviews career achievement awards in series fantasy and series adventure. Her books have appeared on the Waldenbooks/Borders bestseller list for series romance and on the USA Today extended bestseller list. ‡





## PRESIDENT'S CORNER—SEPTEMBER 2009

"So 2009 is my year. It's my time to get that story on the page and finish projects that deserve to be finished. It can be your year too. Let's grab it together and do all we can to help ourselves further along the road to publication." *January President's Corner*

**Goals. Encouragement. Take Action. Keep Writing. Distractions. Recognition. Write some more. Submitting. And the next step – Waiting.**

The submission is in the mail. (Yay!) And now you wait. (I'm waiting.) You either have a postcard that tells you the editor/agent received it or you might have no confirmation at all. (Sent via email so no confirmation.) And you wait. (Did I mention I'm waiting?) And wait... (Yep, still waiting.)

What do you do now?

Keep writing while you're waiting. Keep the momentum you've received from finishing that book to revise another project or begin a new one. Okay, so the dishes and laundry need to be done. You might want to catch up a little on the day-to-day stuff. But you don't want to lose the energy you've created over the past several weeks. Utilize that great feeling of accomplishment and begin again.

Don't be afraid of the results of this submission. You've accomplished what 90% of everyone who wants to write a book can't. You've finished a book. You've done your best. Now it's out of your hands.

SIDE NOTE: At The Golden Network workshop at national conference, I heard several agents state (and the editors agreed) that they were now looking for authors who could write in at least two different genres of romance. These authors would be valuable since the first-sale market is slow and publishers are more reluctant to buy a second book until numbers have been established on the first publication. (That's a two to three year wait, guys and dolls!) In other words: make a sale to one publisher in contemporary, then make another sale to a different publisher in historical. This information is something to keep in mind when you choose your next project. ‡



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[president@ntrwa.org](mailto:president@ntrwa.org)

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[presidentelect@ntrwa.org](mailto:presidentelect@ntrwa.org)

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[membership@ntrwa.org](mailto:membership@ntrwa.org)

### -Website Director

Jen FitzGerald

[website@ntrwa.org](mailto:website@ntrwa.org)

### -Communications Director & Newsletter

#### Editor

Alley Hauldren

[newsletter@ntrwa.org](mailto:newsletter@ntrwa.org)

### -Program Director

Marty Tidwell

[programs@ntrwa.org](mailto:programs@ntrwa.org)

### Committee Chairs:

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Marsha West

[Hospitality@ntrwa.org](mailto:Hospitality@ntrwa.org)

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#### Co-Chair

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[GEcoordinator@ntrwa.org](mailto:GEcoordinator@ntrwa.org)

#### -Bead a Book

Nikki Duncan

[BABS@ntrwa.org](mailto:BABS@ntrwa.org)

#### -Audio Librarian

Nikki Duncan

[librarian@ntrwa.org](mailto:librarian@ntrwa.org)

### -PRO® Liaison

Clover Autrey

[proliaison@ntrwa.org](mailto:proliaison@ntrwa.org)

### -PAN® Liaison

Shelley Bradley

[panliaison@ntrwa.org](mailto:panliaison@ntrwa.org)



Forget-me-nots—September flower



## AUGUST MINUTES

**CALL TO ORDER:** A regular meeting of the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on August 15, 2009 at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The president and secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 10:40 A.M., halted for a break at 10:49 A.M., and reconvened at 10:58 A.M.

### OFFICER REPORTS:

**President, Angi Platt reported:** As there were no corrections or additions to the July minutes, they will be filed for audit. Angi announced a need for volunteers to assist Gina Nelson, who is the 2010 Nominations/Elections chairperson.

**Membership Director, Shelley Kaehr reported:** There are 65 members and 4 visitors.

**Treasurer, Chris Keniston reported:** The July Treasurers' Report was given and filed for audit.

**Program Director, Marty Tidwell reported:** Katherine Garbera is speaking on writing synopses in September. October Shelley Bradley will speak. There are still places available for the North Texas Two Step, November 6th and 7th featuring Margie Lawson and agents Melissa Jeglinski and Cori Deyoe.

**Communications Director, Alley Hauldren reported:** Articles and pictures from the national conference are welcome. The deadline for newsletter articles is the Friday after the general meeting.

**Web Site Director, Jen Fitzgerald reported:** The Members Only section of the web site is now available along with a Members Only Forum. Sign in requires your email address listed on your membership application (or used by YahooGroups for the NTRWA loop) and your RWA® membership number.

**PRO Liaison, Clover Autrey reported:** Michelle Welsh and Marty Tidwell received PRO pins. Forms are available at meetings or online for members wanting to achieve RWA® PRO status.

### COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:

**Hospitality Chair, Marsha West reported:** Baskets are needed for the Texas Two Step Conference, members are asked to donate theme baskets such as chocolate, bath products, movies, or anything a small group wants to put together.

**Spotlight Chair, Shelley Kaehr reported:** Spotlight recipient Tracy Ward, was absent, but is featured in the August Newsletter. September we'll feature Sheniqua Waters.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Marty Tidwell introduced speaker, Pete Salicco, who analyzed five fingerprints, correctly identified a mystery volunteer's print, and spoke about CSI procedures and evidence collection as well as accuracies and fallacies in TV portrayal of CSI procedures. Mr. Salicco asked that the minutes note he returned all the fingerprints to the volunteers.

The business meeting was adjourned at: 11:04.a.m. ‡

## RITA® & GOLDEN HEART® DRAWING



Each year NTRWA has a drawing to encourage its members to enter the RWA® Golden Heart® and RITA® contests. Last year, Laura Martello won the NT drawing and went on to become a finalist.

Members must complete the entry form. A name will be drawn from those entering at the October meeting. The entry form is available on-line ([members only section](#)), in the [YahooGroups file section](#), or you can email [President@ntrwa.org](mailto:President@ntrwa.org).

Please submit the forms electronically (or via mail) by Thursday, October 15th. You do not need to attend the October meeting in order to receive the entry fee reimbursement. NTRWA can either pay the entry fee directly for you, or will need a copy of your entry receipt in order to reimburse you.

The drawings are open to all members-in-good-standing (as of October 15, 2009) of NTRWA who meet the eligibility requirements for the RITA® or the Golden Heart® and, in the case of the Golden Heart® drawing, are members of RWA PRO® as of October 15. ‡

## RISING STAR AWARDS MOST PAGES WRITTEN



Shelley Kaehr — 223 pages  
Bill Woodrow — 155 pages  
Marsha West — 110 pages  
Kym Roberts — 87 pages  
Jerrie Alexander — 80 pages

## SPUR AWARDS MOST PAGES EDITED



Nikki Duncan — 900 pages  
Mary Duncanson — 634 pages  
Lee Swift — 275 pages  
Bill Woodrow — 266 pages  
Jill Wilson — 220 pages



## CREATING EXTRAORDINARY WRITING FROM ORDINARY PHRASES

By Sandra Ferguson

Writers are cautioned again and again to avoid clichés in finished work. Something close to the kiss of death, the publishing community warns. A worthy writer will try to ignore those tasty little tidbits, and come up with more creative twists when a catchy phrase is needed.

So, is that to assume clichés serve no purpose?

While thumbing through an old magazine, I unearthed an article which listed and explored a number of *Time* clichés. Bending time, slipping through time, and sheer manipulation of time are vastly popular ideas. Hollywood and little Hollywood, the small screen, have enticed the viewing public for years with these themes. I spent my own time studying the clichés listed in the article. Were these trite diatribes destined for nothing more than witty dialogue? Could they revolutionize, perhaps, characters, plot, or even universal themes? Upon closer examination, each nugget seemed to identify a specific trait. Or at least, highlight an aspect which could be enhanced, emboldened, even emblazoned to illuminate better writing. As students of human behavior, writers must continually seek ways to broaden characters and bring truisms to page. To that end, those who capture the written words should consider how to manipulate an effective cliché.

Try this one . . .

**Better late than never.** This one probably strikes home for most. Every family seems blessed or cursed with members who believe, nay, cherish the opportunity to make the mantra of 'better late than never' into gospel. These are the individuals who have never been punctual, indeed, can arrive thirty minutes to an hour late and still consider themselves on time.

Sound familiar?

Step beyond the personal and take it to a character level. Would this particular flaw round out a formally flat or static character? Could this trait be reminiscent for the hero or heroine? One he/she dealt with their entire life? One the character emulated? Or perhaps one the character spurned with each breath? Could constant tardiness be a source of fun in a romantic comedy between the hero and heroine? Flip it and consider a suspense book. Characters that are consistently late might well endanger their own lives, or more dramatically, that of a supporting character.

Next, try plot. By integrating the famous phrase, 'better late than never', a writer can employ a number of 'believable' story

twists. Remember, coincidence might work in real life, but never on the printed page. A writer must carefully create a world in which events seem reasonable. If readers question how an occurrence could take place in the story, the writer has squashed reading momentum. Always a bad thing. However, the use of 'better late than never' could place the hero/the heroine in the worst place at the worst possible time and successfully move the story forward in an inconspicuous manner.



Is it possible to take this popular idiom and tweak it for actual use as a theme? Are some things worth waiting for? Even the things that show up late? Really late? Perhaps almost beyond patience? From Jules Vern's, *The Magic Time Machine* to the *Back to the Future* series, time is crucial to the plotline and one of the reoccurring themes for these films.

**History repeats itself.** Considering that the human body regenerates itself with new cells every seven years, perhaps it's inevitable that individuals do not remember all their mistakes and kill their 'bad-choice' repetition. Or perhaps, life really is a circle and everyone ends up where they began. Ever met someone who's married more than once? Twice? Three times? Talk to them about their exes. Chances are there will be startling similarities. What about the person who constantly changes jobs? Always on the move, seeking greener pastures? Again, personality traits are clear with this type of behavior and this cliché. In my romantic suspense, *Harm's Way*®, the security specialist hero holds to the belief that he has badly botched a former job guarding a woman. To that end, he's sworn off the female-protection squad. In this case, history repeating itself is actually what the hero struggles to avoid. His initial conflict is central to this issue. By using this cliché as a tool, it was much easier to nail down his dialogue along with his internal and external reactions when he was finally forced to take on another female client.

"Alex Harmon remembered, would always remember the woman he almost hadn't saved. As long as breath powered

(Creating Extraordinary continued on page 5)



## (Creating Extraordinary continued from page 4)

his lungs, he'd never forget his race against a mad-man's intent on extinguishing another female's life. The high speed pursuit into a secluded section of deep woods, the loss of the suspect, and then a frantic search were little more than bad memories from his federal protection days. But finding the hidden cottage, seeing the structure engulfed in angry orange and roasting red flickers of fire—a burning execution—that wasn't a memory that went away, ever. Four years had passed since Jaycee Donavan's kidnapping and the murder attempt on her life, but it wasn't enough. There might never be enough time.

Alex gave his pat answer. "I don't handle women clients. Not anymore. Not ever."

From a plot stand point, 'history repeating itself' could be applied to villains. Think serial killers, for instance. A federal task force exists solely for the purpose of interpreting the maze of these brutal individuals. That said, certain consistencies run through serial killers' behaviors. Utilizing the well-known phrase, 'history repeats itself', would work into plot lines and build believability. On a more subtle level, children who are raised in foster care typically exhibit certain mannerisms. The very essence of their behaviors can be woven into story fabric, allowing characters to stay true to their nature while driving the plot in a forward motion.

Need more time-oriented clichés? Consider these:

### **Let bygones be bygones**

### **Time and tide wait for no man (or woman)**

### **To every thing there is a season**

Each cliché is more than a song verse or a string of simple words.

By first studying the underlying meanings of these catchy slogans then applying to human tendencies, characters can be enriched. Depth is what makes each individual fascinating. The same is true—more than true, it's mandatory—for characters. Without layers, back-stories, idiosyncrasies, flaws, blemishes, and assets, characters are, look-out here's the 'B' word—BORING!

More than any cliché has ever been the kiss of death, a boring

character will execute a good story—perhaps even a great story. Clichés exist because they spotlight typical behaviors. By twisting and turning these common expressions, writers can helium-charge characters and plots, and add layering to themes. Writers are required, should be by a universal writing law, to use every tool at their disposal, which includes observing and then committing to page the faults and follies of the human race. Clichés are one-sentence forays into that world.

‡

~ Sandra Ferguson calls Texas home. {That and her computer desk} When not under deadline for the next project, she chases after her three kids, the dog, the vacuum, and her husband. A good day is when she finishes her edits and still finds time to spend with her primary hero—her husband. Sandra's first Romantic Suspense, Harms Way, has been e-book released by The Wild Rose Press ([www.wildrosespress.com](http://www.wildrosespress.com)) and is also available in print, ISBN # 1-60154-047-7. Harm's Way is available through Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Amazon.com. Drop by for a Texas visit with Sandra at [lone-star-meanderings.blogspot.com](http://lone-star-meanderings.blogspot.com) or her website: [www.slerguson.net](http://www.slerguson.net)

## **GREAT EXPECTATIONS—A CONTEST TO ENTER!**

While at a publisher signing at national conference this year, I told the author my name, she looked up and said, "Angi, how good it is to finally meet you." (Hey, isn't that my line to the author? LOL) "You probably don't remember me," she continued. "But I finaled in the Great Expectations contest several years ago. I ended up selling my first manuscript to Harlequin from that win. This is my second book."

"Fantastic," I answered. "You'll have to send me a quote for our website."

"Sure, no problem. Have you met my editor?"

And before I could answer, Victoria Curran said, "Oh the Great Expectations Contest. Do you need a judge this year? I'd love to find another Ellen Hartman."

Wow. Wow. WOW !

Needless to say, I answered yes.

Our reputation as a first-rate contest has grown. We're one of THE contests to enter now. NTRWA has a lot of talent and not nearly enough of you enter our chapter contest. Start getting your entry ready. Our 2010 contest deadline is December 30th of this year. Twenty-five pages for \$20.00 as an NT member. You can't beat that price anywhere. And it's getting harder to find a contest that provides three judges' comments.

We'll be drawing for a free entry fee at the December meeting (you must be present to win). Entrants must be unpublished and uncontracted in book-length romantic fiction (over 20,000 words). Published authors must be unpublished and uncontracted in the category entered.

For information on how to enter or judge, please contact: [GEcoordinator@ntrwa.org](mailto:GEcoordinator@ntrwa.org). ‡



## PLOTTING THE ROMANCE: THE BASICS

by Margaret Moore

The following article appeared in the September 2009 issue of *romANTICS*, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.

In a romance novel, the romance, or the developing of a committed relationship, is the primary plot. In other words, it's about the emotional journey of the characters from strangers or friends/enemies to lovers and to a committed partnership. All other elements of the story -- suspense, mystery, opening a restaurant, for instance -- are secondary. Their primary function is to provide situations for the romance to develop. In other words, the activity of the story is the catalyst/conduit for the developing relationship.

In terms of plotting basics:

### Act I:

In a romance, the "inciting incident" is not necessarily the first thing that happens. The inciting incident of a romance novel is "the meet" -- the first time the hero and heroine confront each other in your story.

Several other things should also happen in Act I:

1. Set the stage. Where and when is the story taking place?
2. Introduce the hero and heroine.
3. The meet -- how, when, and why do the hero and heroine meet? What are their first impressions of each other?
4. Introduction of the conflicts (internal and external) that are going to work against the relationship.

In the first act, the internal conflicts don't have to be, and indeed shouldn't be, described in great detail. They should be indicated/hinted at/implied. The details, and especially the motivations of the characters, should be revealed more in the middle, to keep it from "sagging." Tell too much in the beginning, you've got nothing left for the middle.

### Act II:

In a romance, this is where the relationship develops and intensifies. This is, usually, where the characters fall in love (unless you're doing a love-at-first-sight story).

The characters learn more about each other -- what makes each other "tick," their issues and their history. They discover the explanations for the other's "problem" and gain sympathy, empathy and understanding. This is where trust develops.

This is also, but not always, where the relationship becomes more physically intimate--first touch, first kiss, first time they make love. If the relationship is already physical, this is still where the emotional development of the relationship takes place.



### Act III:

In a romance, the crisis that precipitates the ending of the novel should also threaten the survival of the romantic relationship between the hero and heroine. It can be physical or it can be internal (hearing something that shakes the heroine's faith in the hero, for instance).

This is also known as "the black moment" in a romance--when the romance seems hopelessly doomed and there can't be a happy ending for this couple.

At the climax, both the internal and external plots--the romance and the rest of the story--come together. The danger is overcome and survived; the problems are solved; the necessary confessions are made; love is shown/proven/revealed.

The successful resolution of both the external and internal conflicts create the satisfying ending. However, the denouement of a romance must also tie up any loose ends (i.e. ensure that the subplots have also concluded satisfactorily), and, most importantly, must also leave the reader convinced that this couple is in a long-term, committed relationship. ‡

~ USA Today bestselling author and past president of Toronto Romance Writers, Margaret Moore has written over forty historical romance novels and novellas for Harlequin, Avon and HarperCollins Childrens Books. Her latest novel, *The Viscount's Kiss* (Harlequin Historical, August 2009), features a naturalist who loves spiders and a woman who loathes them. Visit Margaret at [www.margaretmoore.com](http://www.margaretmoore.com).

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

It's that time of year again! It's the time to volunteer!

Gina Nelson, current President-Elect will chair the Nomination/Election Committee but needs two general members to help her. The basic duty of the Committee is to ask for volunteers and work with Gina during the election process. That process this year will be electronic voting through our members only section on the website. Several members of our board will not be able to continue in their current positions. Please remember, according to the State of Texas, our group can not continue without its board of directors. Please volunteer. If you are interested in serving on the committee or the 2010 Board, please contact Gina: [presidentelect@ntrwa.org](mailto:presidentelect@ntrwa.org).



## WELCOME TO MY WORLD: A WORLD-BUILDING CHECKLIST

by Deborah Cooke

The following article appeared in the September 2009 issue of *romANTICS*, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.

One of the most commonly cited reasons for reading popular fiction is to lose oneself in another place and time. Although plot, characterization, and language all play a big part in ensuring that a book is compelling, the "world" where the story occurs should also captivate the reader.

I am particularly fond of intricately constructed—and well described—fictional worlds. Time and place is less important than the sense of actually being in the universe constructed by the author. When I think of the stories that really stick in my mind, invariably they're ones that are powerful examples of world building. New Orleans may or may not have ever been the way Anne Rice describes it, but it will always have the lush gothic aura for me that she describes so vividly. Is there a place called Manderly? Does it matter? Daphne du Maurier's description will more than suffice. I'll never forget the rigors of life in a lunar colony from Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, or Tolkien's extraordinarily detailed Middle Earth from *The Lord of the Rings*. The list could go on and on. The setting, or the world the author builds for the reader, is a big part of what makes good fiction compelling.

World-building is the act of designing and then describing a setting with such clarity that it feels like a real world to the reader. World-building is given particular attention in fantasy and speculative fiction, as the setting is assumed to be unfamiliar to your readership and thus must be explained. However, it is no less important in historical fiction, as the same argument can be made, and even in contemporary fiction. Not all of your readers share your experience even of the world we know and love. Presumably you have chosen your setting for a reason—in order to ensure that your reader gets the message, you need to introduce him or her to the place in question.

When an author world-builds well, the setting is distinct from our own, yet the reader still feels a common bond with the characters. This is trickier than it sounds, as it is a combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar. There are no accidents in making this come together well. So, let's look at a tip list for world-building.



### I. Choose Your Book's Setting Deliberately

That's not really as devious as it sounds. You should pick settings or worlds for a reason—because the setting highlights the conflict, or because it's seldom used, because it's a world you know a lot about, or simply because it's a setting that characteristically sells well. (Be warned that if you choose to make up a world to avoid doing research, you're getting into more than you've bargained for! Inventing a consistent world is far more work than researching an existing one.) Whatever the reason, you need to know why you've chosen it. From that, you can decide what you need to highlight about that setting in order to get the most from your choice.

For example, you might choose an 8th century British setting because the story you want to tell is reminiscent of old Celtic tales and you think that the Arthurian setting will showcase those plot elements. Alternatively, you could set the same story in an entirely different era—perhaps in the midst of a modern war—to showcase its romance by contrasting the story with the setting. We see this with Shakespearean plays—directors often change the setting of the play with the intent of showing the timelessness of the conflict. This can work brilliantly or not work at all. If you have a plan, particularly if you're going to defy expectation by setting Macbeth in post WWII Indochina, you'll have a better chance of success.

Whatever your strategy, you need to understand your key reason for choosing the setting.



(World Building continued from page 7)

## 2. Know Your World As Well As You Know Your Own

Or even better. The more you know (or decide) before beginning to write the story, the far easier your job will be. Every time you run off to research a detail or replot a universe, you risk losing the pacing and even the thread of the story itself. So, map it all out ahead of time, chart the big issues and when you run into something you haven't considered, just flag it and keep writing. Although the world building is important, it always takes a back seat to the story.

*You'll need to define what's different about your world and what's distinctive about it, as well as what's the same as our world. A key issue here is consistency . . .*

You'll need to define what's different about your world and what's distinctive about it, as well as what's the same as our world. A key issue here is consistency—you may lose readers with a single loose end which they know doesn't work. For romance, in any period, social histories are the most helpful as they give you information on how people lived (or live). In creating a fantasy world, you might consider yourself to be compiling a social history. It might help you to actually write a guidebook to your world, or at least build a binder of notes so you have a reference.

When you begin to write the novel itself, remember that there are always compromises to be made—you're not writing an anthropological study of your fantasy world, so you can't include every detail in the book. Similarly, a contemporary doesn't have to include a map, etiquette guide, and telephone listing for your chosen setting. When writing historicals, you will have to take a stand on anachronism which you find a comfortable compromise. Working out all of these issues in advance can save yourself a lot of grief.

So, how do you manage the detail?

## 3. Be an Alien of the Same Species as Your Reader

How do you make the world familiar to your reader? This is a challenge, depending upon how different your setting is from the world your reader is likely to know.

Start with the obvious details that the reader is unlikely to understand.

If you are selling commercial fiction—like romance—to a New York based print publishing house, you can make an assumption that most of your readership will be residents of the USA in the early 21st century, which means they understand some things as a given. Cars, telephones, grocery stores, and televised sports to name a few. They will understand jokes about men needing to have the remote, channel flicking, voice mail, and deciphering nutritional information on Cheetos' bags. They may or may not know what it's like to live in Teeny Town, Arizona, or how it feels to hang-glide, or what medieval consanguinity laws were. Notice and explain what you cannot expect readers to universally understand. You won't always get this right, because you can't know all regional differences, but you can make a pretty good run at it.

## 4. Describe the Exceptional and the Unusual

That's how people observe and it's another good trick for managing detail. You notice the woman with the green hair on your way to work, but not the ninety-seven brunettes that you also passed. We observe by discrimination, noting exceptions rather than consistencies. You'll do most of this automatically—no need to explain that all the characters have two arms, two eyes, and two legs unless otherwise noted—but it's a good guideline to keep your descriptions from getting out of control. It's a useful attribute to give aliens of the space-time continuum as well, which we'll talk about in a few minutes.

To get a handle on what could easily become a mountain of description, imagine that you are a time traveler—regardless of what niche you're writing for—or a visitor from "away," maybe a remote island—what would you notice specifically about this setting?

## 5. Describe What the Reader Needs to Know

This can be anything from the mood of the times, the political stability or instability, a foreign country, a class of society, the particular ambience of the private estate where the story takes place, the scene of the crime. This is the reason, essentially, that you chose this setting. If there's anything the reader needs to know in order to understand the plot or the motivation of the characters, ensure you show it to them. Mystery writers are often very clever about this, sliding in the detail that makes it possible for the reader to identify the villain, but burying it so that the reader's eye slides past it.

(World Building continued on page 9)



(World Building continued from page 8)

## 6. Describe What the Reader Wants to Know

Reader expectation is a strange and unusual beast, and its appetites vary from genre to genre. Part of understanding your chosen genre is understanding what the reader hopes to find within the covers of your book.

For historical romance, the reader expects to be immersed in the period setting. Don't forget the clothes, the hair, the furniture, the food, the lingerie, the prancing Lipizzaner horses. For a Regency romance, there is even more specific detail expected—these readers revel in Regency trivia. Similarly, a contemporary that takes place on a military base, or within a police station, needs the "insider" detail to satisfy the reader. A space opera will need to have details about the space ship, how it's managed, what it's like to live on, who's in charge. This is part of your compact with your reader. Recognize why the reader is buying this book and deliver to that.

## 7. Human in the Alien—or Familiar Themes in Unexpected Places

Now we come to the question of introducing commonality. Although your setting may be strange and unusual and the characters just as odd, in order for the reader to care about them, those characters must be understandable. Essentially, you must find the human in the alien, if you're writing fantasy, or the modern in the archaic if you're writing historicals. As readers, we cannot cheer for characters whose choices make no sense to us or whose goals are inexplicable. We certainly can't fall in love with them.

This doesn't mean that the characters must be your neighbors in fancy dress, but that you should use the same technique of selectivity—choose whatever needs to be distinctly odd about the character and make the rest of him or her familiar. The character might show emotions the same way that we do or feel similar emotions but hide them—this is far easier to portray than a character who has no emotions at all. Unless that's the point of the character, like Spock, whose oddities were limited to his ears and his impassivity. It is no coincidence that all of the emotionless characters in Star Trek ultimately developed emotions—and watcher empathy, as well.

*“ . . . you must find the human in the alien, if you're writing fantasy, or the modern in the archaic if you're writing historicals.”*

Conflict and goals provide another point of commonality. A character who wants to fall in love, or is fighting family disapproval, or needs to marry and have children, or has any number of other recognizable goals is more understandable and thus more sympathetic to the reader. Eve in the J. D. Robb series is a cop who wants to catch murderers—this makes eminent sense to us regardless of the unusual world she inhabits. For romance, the protagonists have to have viewpoints on love and partnership, though one of them may not know exactly what it is. Having one character more in tune with the reader's expectation is another trick to not only drive the conflict but make the alien more familiar.

Finally, there can be social trends in your world that are resonant of trends in our own world. In my future-set series, the Republic has endorsed slavery by the late 21st century, although it's different than it has been in the past. There have been nuclear wars waged over oil reserves in this same world. These are plausible possibilities that have some familiarity for readers. Similarly, the science works the same way in my fictional world as our own—I used medical reports from Hiroshima and Chernobyl to speculate upon the effects upon humans of those nuclear wars.

## 8. Consistency

Your world has to be consistent, wherever it is, or its inconsistencies have to be explained. This includes the customs, the role of women, religion, food sources, travel, religions and all other facets of social history, as well as its language and names. There are books and computer games that review what skill sets a society has to have to achieve certain accomplishments, and histories of the development of just about everything. Even for an alien universe, you need to place your civilization somewhere on the continuum and know the implications of that placement. One of the fun things about world-building is putting what we think of as disparate elements together and making them work in a different way, but as mentioned earlier, this is a lot of work.

The protagonists and secondary characters who inhabit your world need to be consistent with it as well, and their expectations should be shaped by it. Look also at character's occupations in contemporaries and historicals and consider what is plausible for this person to know or be able to do, to own or to dream about.

(World Building continued on page 10)



## 9. Structure

Structure for novels is a topic that could lead to an entire workshop in itself. In terms of world building, though, the structure of the book can help you to manage the information.

First of all, don't tell your reader more than he or she needs to know too soon. If you front-load your book with technical explanation, the reader will lose interest before getting hooked by the story. Your main focus at the beginning of the book is introducing the characters and the conflict, and getting the story in motion. Don't bog these passages down with a description of the complex inter-layering of religions on your Venusian futuristic society. The characters and the conflict are what "hook" readers and persuade them to read on in fiction—not an intricate analysis of the geopolitical landscape of 17th century France. However pertinent such details are to the story, save them until after the reader is hooked. Nora Roberts does this very well in her J.D. Robb books—people are sometimes three or four chapters into the book before they say "wait a minute—cars don't fly."

Secondly, use structure to illuminate the world you've dreamed up. In *Fallen*, I had the challenge of a particularly intricate society to present, and the need to do that without slowing down the pacing of the book. The reader had to know about the Republic's politics, history and laws to understand—for example—why Lilia was in trouble for wearing her pseudoskin in public. I chose to insert blocks of Republican law code and newspaper articles at critical points in the story. Both of these types of writing are terse and fact-oriented, so they didn't take up a lot of space. They got right to the point. It didn't make sense for Lilia to expound on all of these items, even though she knew them, because everyone around her knew them too. The insertions worked well, especially as they were typeset in a different font.

## 10. Use Your Characters

If all of the characters hold the same assumptions, they may never question them, let alone explain them. The reader won't understand the alien world and thus may not feel an emotional bond with the characters and their plight. Worse, any explanation inserted by the author will feel forced.

This is an alternative method for presenting the data—more similar to the structure of my *Guardian*, which takes place in the same world as *Fallen*. Having two characters together, one of whom understands the world and one of whom is recently

arrived or seeing a new facet of the world compels the first character to explain—and the reader learns, too.

Another option is to have one of your characters "like us" and the other not. Ursula K. Leguin did this in *The Left Hand of Darkness*—we understand the emissary perfectly, and his confusion about the world he's visiting. This is also used in time travels—one character is usually from our own time, or close enough to it that we understand him or her, and the other is from the other time. Each character's point of view then provides a glimpse of their own world's assumptions as well as their uncertainties about the other world. This is a very useful technique for romance, as it helps the reader to make that critical emotional bond with the character. It compels the "alien" character to explain his or her world to the other character and thus to the reader.

*"The characters and the conflict are what "hook" readers and persuade them to read on . . ."*

But don't assume that this is used purely for fantasy work. If you take a careful look at historicals that work well and don't have a contemporary character, you'll notice that one character (often the heroine for romance) is "just like us" but in different clothes. Similarly, in contemporaries, it's not uncommon for one character to be readily understandable to us and the other less so—often one will be in the military, or a high powered businessperson, while the second is "just like us." Again, the contrast in their experiences compels the characters to make explanations to the other, and thus to the reader.

## 11. Experience Your World

If a setting is described by its visual elements alone, four of the reader's senses have been abandoned for no good reason. If the reader was there, she/he would use every one of those senses. As a writer evoking that scene, you should use them, too. Smell the setting, taste it, hear it, feel it. Draw the reader right into the experience and make it "real" by describing the observations of those other senses.

Romance is particularly conducive to sensory description. Sensation and emotion go easily hand-in-hand—readers bought your book to feel what the protagonists feel, to relive that heady experience of falling in love. When people are in love, they "feel alive," their senses tingle, they're hungry for sensation. In moments of extreme emotional duress (like falling in love) everything is more vivid, more pungent, more of whatever it is, and it should be so for your characters. The only thing to watch here is that you don't overuse this technique. It

(*World Building continued on page 11*)



(World Building continued from page 9)

can become wearying to read page after page of sensory assault—save it for really important moments, like thresholds of change.

## 12. Use Active Verbs

Whenever you associate an active verb with an inanimate object, it flags a reader's attention. You can do this sparingly to attract attention and make your settings more vivid. A good example of this is from Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* when the protagonist describes his own grandfather, who has returned to his home of Kashmir in northern India:

"Aadam's eyes are a clear blue, the astonishing blue of mountain sky, which has a habit of dripping into the pupils of Kashmiri men."

Skies don't drip, we know that, but the choice of words—here and throughout the passage—makes the entire countryside seem alive. Taken to extremes, the setting can become another character, one that is benevolent and malicious by turn. This is a particular hallmark of fantasy writers or authors who incorporate mythology into their work, or gothic romance authors. It's a very effective tool when writing fantasy romance, as well.

## 13. Choose Language Carefully

Be careful of how many words you invent. This is a real temptation when building an alien world especially, but try to limit yourself to naming key concepts in your alternate language. Again, use the technique of highlighting what's important with a distinctive phrase—this will help to keep your pacing crisp. Of course, if you are going to invent a language, you need to learn something about languages and sounds, to ensure that it makes a consistent, cohesive whole. There's nothing more disconcerting than a couple whose names are completely different but who are supposedly part of the same society—how many stories of Scheherazade and Bob have you read lately?

World-building is one of the more rewarding challenges of writing fiction. A well constructed world will grab the reader and force him or her to think according to its maxims, and maybe even escape "real life." Part of your job as an author is to vividly illuminate a world of your own imagining and to paint that world with such clarity that for a few golden hours, it is real to your reader. So, do the extra work and go a bit farther—use these suggestions to make a setting as distinctively your own as your story. ‡

~ Deborah Cooke has published over forty romance novels and novellas, including historicals, contemporaries, paranormal and fantasy romance, under the names Claire Delacroix, Claire Cross, and Deborah Cooke. As Claire Delacroix, she currently is writing a trilogy of future-set (post-nuclear but pre-Apocalyptic) romances for Tor, each of which features a fallen angel hero. Book #2 in that series, *Guardian*, will be an October 2009 release. As Deborah Cooke, she is writing the Dragonfire series for NAL Eclipse, which features dragon shape shifting heroes in contemporary society. Book #4 in that series, *Winter Kiss*, will be a November 2009 release. She also contributed a short story to the Mamoth Book of Vampire Romance II, which will be released in October 2009. For more about her books, visit her websites [www.delacroix.net](http://www.delacroix.net) and [www.deborahcooke.com](http://www.deborahcooke.com), or pop by her blog *Alive & Knitting* at [www.delacroix.net/blog](http://www.delacroix.net/blog)



Conference is coming. It's gonna be great. It will be even greater if you help. We need folks to make up baskets, which we can use for the raffle. What we hope happens is that two to four of you work together on what you'd like in a basket. Is it wall-to-wall chocolate in all its various forms? Is it perfumed lotions and gels to make our bodies soft? Maybe your deal is popcorn, Milk Duds, and DVD movies starring your favorite hunk. Maybe you always want to bid on those baskets with baked goods in them (remember conference is in November). Which reminds me, baskets with holiday themes will go well, too. Engage those wonderful imaginations you all have and come up with even better ideas than those above.

Please have one of you in your group email me the names of the group and your basket idea. I personally don't think we can ever have too many baskets of chocolate, but I wouldn't be as thrilled if it was all bath salts. After you put the basket together, tape to the outside a list of all the items and the approximate value.

Based on the experience of other conferences, we believe this can be financially beneficial to the chapter. We offered extremely low prices and generous payment terms for our own members to encourage greater participation than we've had in the past. We've got an outstanding speaker, and two neat agents. If you are unable to attend, all the more reason to help with a basket. That way you too can choose to be a part of our first ever, North Texas Two Step.

~ Marsha R. West, Hospitality ‡



[newsletter@ntrwa.org](mailto:newsletter@ntrwa.org)

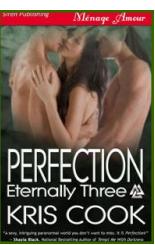
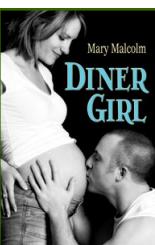
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**NEXT MEETING SEPT. 19, 2009**



## !MEMBER NEWS!

\***Diner Girl** by **Mary Duncanson** writing as **Mary Malcom**—was officially released 8/28 and by 8/29 it's already #5 in the month's best-seller list overall, and #3 for the contemporary novels on The Wild Rose Press website.

\***Angi Platt's See Jane Run** won first place in the Daphne and is a finalist in the Maggie. **The Scoundrel of Scone** is a finalist in the Golden Claddaugh

\***Regina Richards** won first place in the Happily Ever After contest.

\***Marsha West** is a finalist in the Golden Gateway contest, single title category.

\***Shelley Kaehr**, writing as **Leah Leonard**, sold **Dead Man's Diamond**, and writing as **Annette Shelley**, sold **Secrets, Lies, and Exaggeration**.

\***Lee Swift** sold a novella titled **Three to Play** to Siren Publishing.

\***Lee Swift** writing as **Kris Cook** sold **Perfection** to Siren Publishing, available Sept. 9, 2009.

\***Mary Duncanson** sold **Almost Home** to The Wild Rose Press.

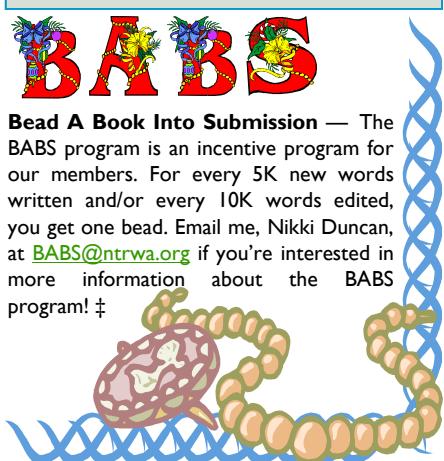
\***Mary Duncanson** finaled in the 2009 Golden Gateway Contest in the Single Title category with a 50 page entry from **The Theatre**, her third book, and this was her first time to final.

\* **Nikki Duncan's Sounds to Die By** will be released by Samhain Publishing Oct. 13th, 2009.



### Audio Library

For a one-time \$10 donation to NT, you have access to the audio library. The library consists of workshops from previous conferences. You check out the CDs that pertain to your current goals at one meeting, listen to them over and over, and bring them back to the next meeting. Repeat the process. Email me, Nikki Duncan, at [librarian@ntrwa.org](mailto:librarian@ntrwa.org) to check out a CD. ‡



**Bead A Book Into Submission** — The BABS program is an incentive program for our members. For every 5K new words written and/or every 10K words edited, you get one bead. Email me, Nikki Duncan, at [BABS@ntrwa.org](mailto:BABS@ntrwa.org) if you're interested in more information about the BABS program! ‡