

**Subject:**

FW: May Newsletter

It's conference season! What conferences are you attending? What are your summer plans? Make time for writing!

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*Founded March 1983*

*May 2013*

*Chapter 33, Region 5*

*Volume 32, Issue 5*

## **Letter from the President**

*Sharing Experiences*

I can't believe this year is flying by so fast. When I became President in January, I expected to be swamped with work all year long, but with the help of a wonderful Board, the job has been well, not exactly easy, but extremely manageable.

Why? The simple answer is that we are a team. We might not always agree on the solution to problems, but we work together to find middle ground that will benefit the chapter.

To that end, the Board met after the April meeting to discuss a few bumps in our road. Our little chapter is growing, and every month, we add new members with new skills. I like to call them potential volunteers who will eventually be potential board members.

There are several positions within our organization that involve time-consuming work from a volunteer. Taking on one of these positions often leads to brain drain, loss of personal writing time, and frustration. Sometimes, it leads to that person dropping away from the group due to exhaustion.

This is not an acceptable outcome!

The Board has determined that a reconstruction of the Board is in order.

For personal reasons, our Website Director has asked to be relieved of her duties. This vital position is difficult to fill due to the technical aspect of the job. Therefore, the Board has opted to outsource our Chapter's website management.

Because we are now running two contests with overlapping timelines, we are creating a Contest Director to oversee both contests, using a committee approach to handle the various jobs inherent to each contest.

In a nutshell, we are breaking a huge job into pieces. Instead of one person working their fingers to the bone to get everything done, each facet of the job will be parceled out to one person. (Think: Instead of doing every job, one person will answer questions about the contest, one person will handle intake of entries, one person will track payment info...)

We'll also use this same procedure for conferences.

And yes, we will need more volunteers with this plan, but what better way to get to know your fellow authors?

From personal experience, I can tell you a conference is more fun as a participant than as a bystander. In every interaction with another author, published or not, I learn something new. Random conversations can inform and sometimes inspire. One never knows where the next big idea might come from.

We learn best when we use shared experiences. This month, Clover shared her knowledge of self-publishing. Next month, we'll share with fellow writers at roundtable discussions. Between now and then, think about what you can add to our discussions. If you're thinking, "I'm new to writing and have nothing to share," please look at other areas

of your life. What do you know? Maybe you have a job that might lend itself to someone's hero/heroine's storyline. Maybe you've studied human anatomy and know exactly where to place a knife to kill someone silently and one of your chapter mates is writing a murder scene. Maybe you know your way around an excel sheet and can keep us all organized.

Speak up and help your fellow writers. It'll be fun. Trust me.

-Michelle Welsh

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April 20, 2013

## **BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES**

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

A regular meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on Saturday, April 20, 2013 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. The minutes for the March meeting were approved as printed in the April newsletter.

### **OFFICER REPORTS:**

**President: Michelle Welsh reported:**

- Reminded attendees regarding raffle tickets, the tip jar, the "Ask Me" badges, and requested courtesy for speakers.

**President-Elect: Clover Autrey: No report.**

**Secretary: Nancy Connally: No report.**

**Treasurer: Angi Morgan reported:**

- Distributed and explained the budget.
- The Treasurer's report will be filed for audit.

**Program Director: Lara Lacombe reported:**

- Distributed a questionnaire for the annual members retreat to be held the first weekend in November.
- Requested input from members regarding what they would like to see in the conference.
- T-shirts are available
- The Published Author Roundtable will be the May meeting.
- Sylvia Day will speak at the June meeting.

**Membership Director: Jen FitzGerald reported:**

- There are 69 members.
- Introduced visitors: Susan Welch, Darla Nalley, Tish Sanders and Mary Duncanson.

**Communications Director: Heather Long was absent.**

**Website Director: D'Ann Burrow was absent.**

**COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:**

**PAN Liaison: Nikki Duncan was absent.**

**PRO Liaison: Jeanne Guzman reported:**

- Urged PRO members to become active on Yahoo loop.
- Explained qualifications for PRO. Members should email Jeanne if they qualify for PRO.
- Explained benefits of PRO including appointments at the RWA National Conference.

**Great Expectations: No report.**

**Hospitality: Sidney Bristol was absent.**

**Spotlights: Gina Nelson reported:**

- Molly Cannon was the Member Spotlight.

**Audio Librarian: Clover Autrey: No report.**

**Writing Incentives: In the absence of Chrissy Szarek, Jen FitzGerald reported:**

- Explained the Treasure Chest. It will be resumed next month.
- Reported on entries on the clipboards.

**Texas Two-Step: Nikki Duncan was absent.**

**Bylaws: Angi Morgan: No report.**

**Unfinished Business:** None

**New Business:**

- Carolyn Williamson announced and distributed information regarding the DFW Writer's Workshop.

Next Business Meeting: 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, May 18 at La Hacienda. The meeting adjourned at 11 a.m.

Submitted electronically by Nancy Connally

Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Corrected: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Most Pages Written

- Angi Morgan 195

- Suzan Butler 169
- Mary Duncanson 78
- Michelle Welsh 76
- Dakota Byrd 56

## Most Pages Edited

- Roni Loren 680
- Angi Morgan 660
- Suzan Butler 597
- Susie Sheehey 502
- Mary Duncanson 385

# Heather's Big Bang – or How She Plans a Series

by Heather Long

When it comes to planning a series there are lots of ways to do it—charts, timelines, character maps, spreadsheets, and storyboards and then there's the writing of it and if it sticks in my brain, it stays in the book. Neither is really ideal for me. So how do I write a series?

### With a Big Bang

At some point, I had a question or a character or a kernel of an idea and pretty much every series becomes an extension of that with characters introducing me to new ones, and growing it organically.

But where do I start? Do I create the world first? Or do I come up with the story idea? To be honest, there is no one *right* answer to that question. I have come up with story ideas before that made me consider the world around that character and I've wanted to write characters or a story set in a world I imagined. In fact, yesterday I wrote out a proposal for a multi-book series that began with a typo in an instant message. Seriously!

- The Chance Monroe series began with the character Chance. I knew she was a Hedge Witch, bound to the land and her magic was very specific. The world I constructed around her reflected that initial idea.
- The Fevered Hearts series began with the desire to write a paranormal in a world without technology, cars, high speed communications and a sense of isolation. I chose the Old West and reached back into Texas in the 1850s to fulfill that idea.
- My Marine series relies on the premise of Mike's Place—a fictional rehabilitation facility that doubles as a backdrop and a central meeting point for so many of my characters, but again this began with the story of Luke and Rebecca in *Once Her Man, Always Her Man* and grew from there.

So there is no one right way to world build and no one sure fire way to make your world "perfect." I like to construct a world around a central idea—the spark, if you will, of inspiration. For an author, that spark serves as our big bang.

My methods are a mash-up. I know the hard rules of my world, but I also leave myself room for organic growth (which can be problematic when a character you didn't know had powers suddenly demonstrates them or a hero you thought was perfectly

fine conceals his PTSD and spins everything you thought in a different direction—problematic, but fun.).

### **Keeping it Straight**

Creating a series is a lot like building a personal profile or in this case, a forensic one, of the elements in that world. You have to ask yourself some basic questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? As authors, we're forever asking this kind of question about our characters, their families, our plots, our storylines—so of course, we have to ask them about the world we're building. But there's a bigger question that gets asked—and we ask it all the time:

*What if?*

At the root of all speculative fiction whether it is hard-core science fiction, space opera, urban fantasy, horror, mystery, paranormal romance, pure fantasy or romance, the question that starts it all, is *what if?*

- What if robots developed sentience? (Isaac Asimov)
- What if Death were a woman? (Neil Gaiman)
- What if a vampire hunter fell in love with a vampire? (Joss Whedon)
- What if a young man gained extraordinary powers? (Stan Lee)
- What if the world united under a flag of peace and sought to explore the stars? (Gene Roddenberry)

See, these very simple "what if" questions become the essential building blocks of your world. Imagine, if you will a table full of bins. In each of the bins are Legos. They come in all shapes, colors and sizes. You can put them together in an infinite variety of configurations. Where do you start?

What if supernatural gifts were real and could be harnessed for law enforcement? (Kay Hooper)

This question then engenders the next question.

- If supernatural gifts are real and law enforcement uses them, does it not also follow that criminals might have access as well?
- How do you test for the powers?
- How accepted are they?
- Are there laws governing their use?

See? Each question can spawn another and another. In *Babylon 5*, J. Michael Straczynski revealed the terrifying layers behind the Psi Corps. Telepathic and telekinetic humans scared others, but even among their own kind there was a divide—between those who wanted to blend in and those who wanted power. The Psi Corps were mother and they were father, children were taken from their parents and raised in the Corp, they were isolated, forever wear gloves, forbidden casual touch, and limited to the laws of their kind—it was terrifying and brilliant and rooted in a rich history of humanity.

### ***And it all began with a what if question...***

So when it comes to my series—they all begin as a what if question and as I answer those questions, I do have to keep a running checklist usually about the characters themselves so I don't accidentally change their eye color or their back story or

some other key feature.

At the end of the day, I write these series because I need to find the answers to those questions, too! The problem is, answers usually come with new questions and darnit! That usually means more books.

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*Heather Long is a multi-published author who is most likely working on the next book in one of her series. You can learn more about her at <http://www.heatherlong.net>*

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*The following article appeared in the December 2012 issue of In Print!, the monthly newsletter of Houston Bay Area RWA. Permission granted to reprint or forward to sister RWA chapters with proper credit to author and chapter.*

## **THE BUSINESS SAVVY AUTHOR**

by Vicky Dreiling

After nine years working as a market research analyst for a F500 corporation, I've learned valuable lessons about professionally managing my day career. I apply those lessons to my writing career as well. Here are my tips to become a business savvy author.

### **You are your own public relations manager.**

Every time you speak or post on the Internet, you are essentially putting out your own press release. What you say and how you say it affects your reputation as an author. Consider how you want agents, editors, booksellers, other authors, and readers to view you as an author. Act accordingly.

### **In marketing, perception is reality.**

In focus groups, I've witnessed the shock of engineers and product managers when they hear respondents' erroneous perceptions of a product. I always tell them Perception is Reality. What that means is that it will take a great deal of work and positive messaging to reverse the incorrect or negative perceptions. As writers, this means avoiding shooting yourself in the foot. Recently, I've seen several authors publicize bad news such as poor reviews, low sales or rejections online. If you get a negative review, don't publicize it. Focus on the positive ones. If you are currently submitting manuscripts, don't post about recent rejections on your blog or website. Why? Because you may create a negative perception about your work to other agents or editors. Remember, perception is reality.

### **If you want to succeed, don't make enemies.**

You may have had negative experiences with a former critique partner, agent or editor, but be wary of venting your frustrations to anyone except the most trusted friend. Be honest with yourself as well. There are always two sides to a disagreement. If a relationship goes sour, then have the strength to do what you can to either improve it or sever it if necessary. Don't burn bridges because you never know when you might have to work with that person again.

### **Propose solutions.**

One of the most important lessons I've learned in my marketing career is to avoid complaining. My previous manager gave me some great advice. She worked hard to overcome emotional reactions because it wastes energy. Instead of complaining, focus on finding solutions to the problem. Others will view you as a team player and a positive influence.

**Do network.**

You don't have to be an extrovert to form relationships with other authors. Dare to reach out. In my opinion, the majority of RWA writers are friendly and helpful. If you're a newbie, volunteer for your local or online chapter. Take advantage of mentoring programs if they're available. Write favorable reviews for an author whose book you enjoyed. Give and you will receive.

**Formulate a marketing plan.**

Set an overall goal and then list realistic steps to achieve it. Periodically review your intermediate goals and be flexible about making necessary changes. Setting an overall goal to publish in five years is unrealistic; it may happen sooner or later. Instead, honestly evaluate your writing capabilities and let that guide you.

**Kick the green-eyed monster to the curb.**

At some point in your career, you'll likely feel a pang of envy over another writer's good news. It's especially difficult if you've gotten a rejection or a low contest score. But don't let that pang of envy turn into raging jealousy. We've all seen authors give back-handed compliments to a writer celebrating good news. These back-handers are the types who let jealousy fester and spend their time ripping others apart. But while they're wasting energy disparaging others, the successful author is working hard on her next project. Develop strategies to deal with the inevitable disappointments in this writing business and keep your focus on your own career.

**Ask for what you want.**

If you don't ask, you'll never get it. This particular subject highlights the importance of having a business savvy agent. Sometimes what you ask for is inadvisable. Other times, it doesn't hurt to try. In the latter case, the worst that can happen is the other party will say no.

**Take control of your career.**

Yes, there are aspects of the publication business that you have no control over. Lines fold, editors move to new houses, and trends change. You have two choices: whine about your misfortune or reinvent your career. Successful authors do the latter.

**Dare to Submit.**

Once you've polished your manuscript to the best of your ability, do your homework and then start submitting. Fear is your greatest enemy in this business.

**Have the courage to say no, thank you.**

There may be times in the course of your career when you will be offered an opportunity that does not align with your goals. The decision is often gut-wrenching. Take your time, ask questions, and do your research. You can only make the best decision you can with the information you have at the time. Remember, it's your career. Do what's best for you, even if it means turning down an opportunity. For the record, I've done it, and I have no regrets.

**Finally, the best advice I ever got.**

When I was a newbie, an editor told me something I've never forgotten. She put her fist to her heart and said, "Listen to your own inner voice."

May the Magic Romance Fairies be with You!

*Vicky Dreiling is a confirmed historical romance junkie and Anglophile. Frequent business trips to the UK allowed her to indulge*

*her passion for all things Regency England. Bath, Stonehenge, and Spencer House are among her favorite places. She is, however, truly sorry for accidentally setting off a security alarm in Windsor Castle. That unfortunate incident led her British colleagues to nickname her "Trouble." When she's not writing, Vicky enjoys reading, films, concerts, and most of all, long lunches with friends. A native Texan, she holds degrees in English literature and marketing. This article was adapted from an article on her web site, [www.vickydreiling.com](http://www.vickydreiling.com).*

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The following article appeared in the April 2013 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor. It may be reused by RWA chapters with appropriate credit to the author and chapter. Permission form is on file with the editor.

## I'm a Writer-You Do the Math

By Maureen Castell

I write romance novels, as do all of you (or you wouldn't be members of RWA), stories about people in ordinary or strange situations, in any time period from the far future back to the year dot. But all our stories have one thing in common: the relationship and love between our protagonists.

Do you see any numbers in there? Any calculus or geometry or algebra?

I have a friend who teaches writing to engineers. Can you guess their one complaint? "Why do I need to learn how to write? All I need to know is how to make this bridge structurally sound." But then my friend points out that they still have to write engineering reports, specifications, installation instructions. If those aren't clear, then the bridge is built incorrectly and it falls down.

So just as engineers need to know how to write, writers need some math. But aside from the business stuff we all have to know (advances and royalties, print runs and agent percentages), is there ever really any math in our actual stories?

I didn't think so, until last week. You see, I'm writing a series of stories that span 300 years (the first story starts the overarching event, the next story, 200 years later, resurrects the problem, and the final three cover two generations in the last 20 years of the series, leading to the resolution). Yes, there's a bit of math in there, but nothing too scary. So what happened last week to make me change my mind? I decided to tighten the timeline from 300 years to three generations.

Simple enough, you may think. Just change all your dates by 200 to 300 years.

But it's not just dates I have to worry about now, it's ages. You see, the h/h in my first story could now still be alive for the last one. Things the h/h in the second story had to guess at they can now go to their parents to simply ask. To make things more complicated, the year the last story happens is significant, so while I can change all the other years, they have to be in relation to that one. And the final complication? All this takes place in the BCs, so the dates are in reverse order.

So how did I solve my dilemma? I drew a family tree, then I built a spreadsheet (it's just a glorified table with columns and rows, and all you need to know is how to add and subtract). In the second column I listed all the events I needed to map out. Then I put the names of my characters across the top (not just the major characters, but any minor ones who have walk-on parts), starting in the third column with the oldest. I figured out his age when we first meet him. I know how old the heroine is

compared to him, so her age went next. When their kids started appearing and having their own stories, I arbitrarily added 18 to 20 years to the original h/h's ages (or more if I needed them to be older). I marked when each child was born and how old they were when the next event happened or the next character made an appearance. Finally, when I got to the h/h in the last story (and that critical date), I put that date in the first column, then worked backwards up the table, subtracting age differences to determine the other dates.

By the time I had finished, I knew when every event happened, how old everyone was at the time, and whether the h/h of the current story would be able to ask advice from anyone else in previous stories.

Conclusion? If you are writing a series or family saga, math becomes one of your essential tools. So yes, we are writers, and we \*can\* do the math.

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*Maureen Castell is working on final edits of the first book in her series and hopes to send it out to contests and submission shortly.*

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The following article appeared in the May issue of ShoreLines, the newsletter of the Long Island Romance Writers, Debora Dale, Editor. Permission is granted to sister chapters to reprint or forward article with proper credit to author, newsletter and chapter.

## You've Typed "THE END" Now What?

by Jolyse Barnett

Congratulations! You've completed your manuscript. You've plotted, drafted, edited, revised, and polished. What's next? If you're a yet-to-be-published author like me, you ask more experienced writer friends for advice. Here's what I've gleaned during a recent round of submissions:

### **Enlist the help of beta readers.**

Chose a half-dozen or so writer friends whose writing you respect, including published writers with experience in your story's genre. Give them the details such as word count, your primary concerns about the story, and when you'll need the feedback. If they are willing and able, that's when you beg them for brutal honesty and promise you won't hold their opinions against them. (You have to mean it!)

### **Research your target agent and/or publisher submission guidelines while waiting for beta feedback.**

The requirements can vary considerably, so be sure to keep track of who wants what. For example, I wrote a 44K romantic suspense/magical story. I'm targeting Avon Impulse, Entangled Publishing, and Harlequin Digital First publishers. One publisher requires a 200-word synopsis, another expects 1-2 pages, and the last requires 2-5 pages.

**Draft your query letter.**

Follow submission guidelines for your target agent or editor. If the directions aren't specific, my advice is to lead with your hook, followed by the story's plot, and then title, genre, and word count of your manuscript. If you have writing credentials (such as published articles), include those in a sentence or two at the end. I've heard mixed reviews about listing contest wins, so that's your call. End your letter with a sentiment such as, "Thank you for your consideration." My query letter for a single manuscript submission (as opposed to a series submission) is one page maximum. Using a reputable online source such as Janet Reid's <http://queryshark.com> for samples can be helpful, too.

**Draft your synopsis.**

Write the GMC for each scene if you haven't already. For a short synopsis, focus on the major turning points. For the longer ones, you may include other significant events within the story. Don't be fooled, thinking it's easier to write a shorter synopsis. I spent five days drafting and revising a 200-word synopsis. This isn't always a writer's favorite part of the process, but it's critical you know your story inside and out. Synopsis writing can point out areas of weakness in your manuscript, and may bring you back to the revision stage. That's okay; you'd rather catch errors before you submit.

**Analyze the beta feedback.**

Thank each of your wonderful beta readers for taking time out of their writing schedule to help you. Then dig in. I suggest reading through the feedback for each manuscript, taking notes as you go or opening your original document on your computer while popping back-and-forth between your beta copies and your version. As you input revisions, be sure to keep your original version intact. Create a new manuscript document for your revisions. You never know when you may change your mind and wish to revert to part, or all, of your original. This part of the process can be overwhelming. Break it down into sections. Consider the commonalities among the beta responses. Those are likely the greatest weaknesses of your story, whereas diametrically opposed suggestions may indicate reader subjectivity rather than a manuscript flaw. Resist the temptation to defend your writing or debate with your beta readers after the fact. Use your judgment. Remember, it's your story. After you've mulled over all the beta responses, be prepared to make further revisions on your manuscript. It's all part of the process.

**Proofread.**

This is where a trusted copyeditor comes in handy, especially if you aren't naturally gifted in spelling, grammar, punctuation, or formatting. Even if you are, it's difficult to read your own work with the discerning eye needed for proofing a manuscript. If you cannot afford to pay a copyeditor, at the very least have someone you trust read the story from beginning to end on the lookout for such errors, including missing words.

**Polish your query and synopsis.**

Ask writer friends, perhaps a few willing beta readers, to provide feedback on our query and synopsis. Analyze the responses as you did for your story.

**Organize your submission packet.**

Save your documents in an online folder, including the version of your manuscript sent, as well as the query, synopsis, and any other required parts of the packet. That way, if you make further revisions to your manuscript between submissions, you have an accurate account of what you sent to each agent or editor.

What do you do after you've finished all these steps? That's simple. Celebrate your accomplishment, and write another story.

*Jolyse Barnett writes contemporary romance and romantic suspense, often with a sprinkle of magic. When she's not creating adventures for the characters in her head or blogging at [Margarita Moments & Other Escapes](#), she can be found playing Wii with her two children, sipping Malbec by the fireplace, or biking with her husband in Key West.*

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2013 Meeting Schedule

Join us May 18th for the

## **Published Author Round Table**

**Future Meetings:**

**June:** RWA President and Best Selling Author Sylvia Day will be visiting! Don't miss out.

*Email questions, comments, or articles to [newsletter@ntrwa.org](mailto:newsletter@ntrwa.org).*

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