



Paranormals: Writing outside the box




Panelists: Erika Tsang (Executive Editor, Avon), Jeaniene Frost (*Night Huntress* series), Kelley Armstrong (*Women of the Otherworld* series), Melissa Marr (*Wicked Lovely* series), and Rachel Vincent (*Shifters* series)

Rules?

The first thing you need to need to know? *There aren't any rules.* No, really. Within the parameters of Paranormal Romance and Urban Fantasy, you will find different voices, species, narrative structures, degrees of romance/action/suspense, myth/lore familiarity as well as “winging it.”

The panel discussion is open to audience questions at any point, but we have several key areas we will address.

Series and stand-alones

-  Stand-alone (one love, one book)
-  Companion Novels (friends and neighbors need love too)
-  Series (“She Saved the World—a lot”)

Notes:



Paranormal romances can extend beyond one book with the same hero/heroine. This doesn't have to break the happily-ever-after rule. Within a single book (and in life),

relationships aren't over or resolved at the moment of admission of love. There is no restriction on this extending beyond a book.



Similarly—as Nora Roberts has demonstrated so beautifully--novels where the series is set in the same "world" can allow the hero/heroine to appear later as secondary characters while a new hero/heroine pair takes center stage in each book.



A distinction often drawn between Paranormal Romance and Urban Fantasy is that a happily-ever-after romantic resolution for the hero/heroine isn't a guarantee within UF.



Some books naturally call for another book with the same characters or in the same world. In those cases, companion books or series books (or both) are wise.



Don't let editors, agents, or readers' pressure allow you to extend a series past its expiration date.

Point of View, tense, and other narrative issues



Present, Past, or Mixed Tense? (Now or Then or . . . *both?*)



How Many Voices? (Your characters speak, so who gets the mic?)



Other Structural Possibilities (Letting your Lit-Geek-Streak free)

Notes:



If third person works better for your story, use it; if first fits, use that instead. It's about the story—not arbitrary rules. The market supports variety.



If your story requires multiple voices—within the same text or within several texts—that option is open to you.



Arguably, a multiple narrator series may cost you in sales, but can keep the series fresh for you as a writer. Do not be surprised when readers—and publishers—are demonstrating preference for a specific narrator.



Texts don't have to be in past tense. Skill level and the story's needs should guide the style, but there are more options than 1st person past.



Don't be afraid to try other elements of non-standard narrative structure (dual timelines, epistolary intrusions, non-linear narrative, et al).



The key is *knowing what **your** story needs*. The market allows—and often invites—variety in narrative structure.

Heroes, Heroines, and Villains



Heroes (The Other as Lover?)



Heroines (Every Protag a Slayer . . . or not so much?)



Stereotypes and Tropes

Notes:



UF and Paranormal Romance don't have to focus on female characters. One can tell the story via multiple characters (of either or both genders) if handled skillfully.



Paranormal doesn't mean that the Other has to be the love interest. It doesn't mean *anything* in terms of your role in meeting expectations. Write the story you have to tell.



When it comes to urban fantasy heroines, remember that strong doesn't have to mean kick-ass. It can, but it doesn't have to. Some texts show us everyday women in extraordinary circumstances; others are using wit and bravado to survive; and sometimes heroines get hurt . . . or rescue heroes. There are NO requirements.

Creatures, mythology, and folklore



Playing without guidelines



Lore As Anchor

Notes:



With the breadth of world mythology, there's no reason to restrict yourself to the tried-and-true vampires, werewolves and spell-casters.



One possibility is to buy an encyclopedia of the supernatural and find something unique that appeals to you. Another possibility is to go to your library or bookstore

folklore section to browse. (Check out sacredtexts.com for free online access to a lot of old texts.)



If you're set on vampires or werewolves, you can check out other cultural interpretations of the legends to find a unique slant on them.



Whatever lore you utilize, be *consistent* in it. If you set forth that your creature/Other cannot do X, you should not upend your worldbuilding to make that happen in a later text.



Leave work-arounds as you go *or explain the exception* in a believable way if you opt to break your rules. If you cannot do this, your plot should not go there.



Folklore and myth have long been used as metaphors, vehicles by which we can talk about other things. These traditions are rich sources of possibilities for crafting new stories with old lore.



Do not let your lore be so consuming that your other essential text elements (plot, character, conflict, and pacing) suffer. The relationship between lore and other textual elements should be a natural, organic flow. The lore informs and strengthens the plot, the characters, the conflicts, and thereby, the pacing.

Trends



As anyone following market flux can tell you, vampire texts are leading the market both in adult and young adult texts. In action-packed UF and in Paranormal Romance, fangs are selling.



This is interpreted both as “write these” and “don’t write these.”



Market and industry articles talk about the “next trend” and whether a trend is over. This is good to know, but it shouldn’t be how you decide your focus.



The one thing that the panelists agreed on in this topic was that *writing what you are drawn towards is the key*. No one on this panel is writing texts to a market—and that has not been a hindrance in any of our texts’ receptions.



You don't need to follow the pack to be successful—nor do you need to avoid a species because of their success.