

**From Hook to Happy Ending:
Using High Concept and Conflict to Make Your Historical Novel Rock**

Presenters:

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Workshop

I. Romantic high concept element

—another way to say the big main external conflict between them

—design plot so that hero and heroine can always be together

A. Raise it to the next level.

B. Pare it down to 25 words

II. Conflict

—the opposition of person or forces that gives rise to the dramatic action in fiction (dictionary)

—mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external/internal demands (dictionary)

A. Real conflict grows out of situations you've set up, and shows gradual changes in the state of mind of the characters (Cara Summers)

— Two kinds of conflict, and your book should have both

1. Inner conflict--something driving the character so they can't be happy at the beginning—something incomplete about them that they have to overcome by the end

2. External conflict—something outside the characters, like the bad guy plot, revenge, a wager, each character wanting something that pits them against each other

B. Can't be easily solved, has to be worked at, maybe seems impossible

C. Conflict between them should change by the mid-point of the book, becoming deeper, more personal, more about internal conflict

D. Character plot driven conflict: come up with high concept plot, romantic plot, and then have to come up with something for them to do

E. External plot driven conflict--action oriented, story is driven by the external elements rather than the character conflicts (although that's still important, especially in Romance)

III. Characters

--Characters are what make the plot important and drive a romance

- A. "if one wins, the other loses"—can have same goal, just different methods
- B. The characters in a romance must have backstories to overcome – need so many ways to grow, that even with no plot between them, they couldn't be married and happy in first chapter—They should grow during the book to regain their original identity
- C. In Romance, each character must grow and learn about self.
- D. Ask "why" questions about your characters and plot.
- E. Give them qualities to appeal to each other, and also give them flaws, so they're not perfect (because of their internal conflicts)
- G. One technique is to write out 4-5 emotional conflicts for each character, to make sure you have enough conflict

IV. Think Scenes

--Scenes are conflict between characters that happen in one time and place in pursuit of a goal (Bob Mayer)—plays out in real time, shows characters, moves story

- A. Scene examples: opening scenes (where something changes for the characters), sex scenes, scenes showing external/internal plotline, how they fall in love, overcome internal problems, the black moment, the ending
- B. 3-5 things happen in each scene
— As each scene ends, characters should be in a different emotional place than before (they've learned something)—something is at stake in each scene
- C. If the hero and heroine aren't together for a couple pages, they should definitely be thinking about each other
- D. Escalate internal/external conflicts shown as scenes progress, so things look worse and worse up to the Black Moment
- E. Scenes show character growth until they learn to handle their problems differently

F. Scenes of reflection between action scenes where they learn and grow and fall in love—reflect on previous scene if it wasn't in their POV

Technique suggestion: For everything in their background, make a “discussion” card, so you remember to have them talk about it.—discuss their views on marriage—their (wrong) idea of perfect mate—their childhood—their traumas

G. Set up the romance plot so they both don't say “I love you” until the final scene—otherwise no tension

1. They can think it
2. One might say it

H. Figure out the Black Moment—worst part of book, when all seems lost—tie into what character fears, worst case scenario – internally and externally

1. Resolve (consciously or unconsciously) with what they've learned through their internal conflicts
2. They make a different decision to solve Black Moment, than they would have at the beginning of the book

V. Grounding your high concept plot in history

A. Research

1. Primary Sources
 - Travel, paintings, journals/diaries
 - Google Books
 - Online newspapers/gazettes
 - Personal letters and papers
2. Secondary Sources
 - Books (general histories)
 - Travel books and videos

B. Common errors can pull readers out of the story

1. Too much history in your romance story
2. Anachronisms
3. Inaccuracy

C. Majority of writers specialize in one historical era (some exceptions)

1. Gives the author an identity for readers
2. The writing might come easier because you know the era

D. Create conflict that is dependent on the era -

1. It's not a contemp that's plopped into the past
2. Place your characters into the era- not just into their costumes
3. Make the conflicts reflect the times

Speaker Bios

USA Today Bestselling author **Gayle Callen** writes Victorian historical romances for Avon Books. Her eighteenth novel, *Never Dare a Duke*, was published in December 2008. She also writes medieval romances as Julia Latham.

Margo Maguire is the author of 16 historical novels, including *WILD*, which was a January 09 release and *TAKEN BY THE LAIRD*, will come out in October. Writing in both medieval and regency eras, her books have been translated into more than 15 different languages.

May Chen is an Editor with Morrow/Avon. In addition to well-written, lush Regency, Victorian and Medieval set historical romances, she also enjoys smart commercial women's fiction with a unique angle and contemporary romances with kick-ass heroines!

Paige Wheeler is a founding partner of Folio Literary Management, LLC who currently represents commercial fiction, romance, mysteries, thrillers, psychological suspense; as well as narrative nonfiction and prescriptive nonfiction including self-help, how-to, business, pop-culture, popular reference projects and women's issues.