

THE MAKING OF A ROMANCE NOVEL

by Stephanie Bond

Ever wonder how a romance novel goes from being a figment of an author's imagination to becoming a finished book on your shelf? Every romance publisher has individual submission and production guidelines, but these are the basic steps in the making of a romance novel:

1. Author submits romance manuscript to an editor at a publishing house.
2. If the editor accepts the manuscript, he/she will offer the author a contract.
3. If the editor requests revisions, the author and editor work together until the manuscript meets the editor's final approval. The author submits a final version of the manuscript, along with a copy of the story on computer diskette.
4. The editor line-edits the manuscript, checking the conceptual aspects of the book such as plot line, characterization, dialogue, momentum, and tone. A copy of the line-edit is usually provided to the author.
5. The manuscript then goes to a copy-editor who checks for publishing house style (formatting, word usage), grammar, continuity, and time-line. He/she flags questions for the line-editor and/or author.
6. After questions have been resolved, the production department enters all changes from the author, the line-editor, and the copy-editor onto the author's diskette copy of the story.
7. A 'galley' is printed from the updated diskette. The galley is the final form in which the author will see the story before it goes to print.
8. The author reviews the galley and submits changes if necessary.
9. The proofreading department inputs the author changes and reads the galley again, usually more than once.
10. The galley is sent to production.

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At the same time the manuscript is being tweaked, the cover art for the book is being assembled:

1. Author submits cover art forms to editor with suggestions for cover pose, background, et cetera.
2. The book title is checked against other in-house titles and finalized.
3. The editors meet to discuss artwork for several books at one time to reduce duplication or perhaps play up a theme or a holiday.
4. A senior editor meets with representatives from the marketing and art departments to develop a 'package' for the book which might include a cover look, a sales angle, or even specific phrases to build on a marketable element in the story.
5. The art editor assigns the cover art to an in-house artist or commissions an outside artist to execute the agreed-upon scene.
6. A photo shoot is scheduled, and the artist produces a painting for the cover which might consist of poses from the photo shoot and/or other elements the artist feels is appropriate, such as clothing, props, and background.
7. The cover art painting is sent to production.

Meanwhile, the 'blurb package' is being assembled by the primary editor. The blurb package might consist of the back cover copy, tag lines or quotes for the front cover, quotes for the inside cover, a 'teaser' page which is usually a paraphrased scene in the book, the author biography and/or backlist, a 'dear reader' written by the author, plus acknowledgments and dedications. The blurb package is sent to production.

In production, all elements of the book—the text, the cover art, and the blurb package—are combined to create the finished product that is shipped to you the bookseller. You might be interested to know that books are assembled in booklets called 'signatures' (you can see the individual signatures if you look at a book with a loose spine). Signature size varies, but is typically sixteen pages. If the text of a book ends before the end of a signature, the remaining space is usually filled with excerpts or advertising, which explains why books have varying amounts of 'filler' pages.

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So, there you have it! From the author's hands and the reader's hands, romance novels go through many stages, with input from dozens of publishing advisors along the way. In short, many people are working together every day to ensure the best product possible to satisfy your romance customers. And if you've read a romance novel lately, you know the system works beautifully.

(Many thanks to Brenda Chin, Editor for Harlequin, Canada, for providing input for this article.) ~**S**Bond