

# RWR

## ROMANCE WRITERS REPORT

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**Chapter Spotlight:**  
**Southern Magic Chapter**

**The Writer As Reader —**  
**Can This Marriage Be Saved?**

**Deep POV: The Importance of**  
**Perception in World Building**

**Write Your 'Destination Romance'**  
**TV Movie Script Today!**



# Inside

## YOUR GUIDE TO THIS ISSUE

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- 3 Message from the President  
By Clair Brett
- 4 News & Updates
- 6 Chapter Spotlight:  
Southern Magic
- 8 RWA Contests
- 9 The Writer As Reader — Can This  
Marriage Be Saved?  
By Janet W. Butler
- 13 Deep POV: The Importance of  
Perception in World Building  
By Romy Summer
- 16 Write Your 'Destination Romance'  
TV Movie Script Today!  
By Scott Kirkpatrick
- 21 Contests & Conferences
- 22 New Members
- 23 Debut Authors/Milestones

## Contributors

### Janet W. Butler

Janet W. Butler splits her days between writing, editorial consulting—and music. Winner of the RWA Golden Heart Award, she is the creator of 12 Weeks to Your First (or Next) Novel, a compilation of lessons and tips from her popular workshop series. When she's not singing or at the piano, she's writing more books...proudly represented by RWA member Terrie Wolf at AKA Literary Management.



### Emily Keyes

Romy Sommer is the author of seven contemporary romance novels published by HarperCollins London, and she has also indie-published a further eight books under her own name and a pseudonym.



As the founder and first chairperson of ROSA (Romance writers Organisation of South Africa), Romy discovered a passion for working with and growing aspiring writers which led her to a new career as a writing coach and developmental editor. She pioneered writing courses for Savvy Authors and Now Novel before joining Gemini Writer's Studio.

Romy has been a RAMP mentor, a Pen to Paper Guide, and is currently the Instructional Design Lead and Guide Liaison for RWA's new Paper to Polished self-editing program.

### Scott Kirkpatrick

Scott Kirkpatrick is the Executive Vice President of Co-Productions & Distribution for Nicely Entertainment—a Los Angeles-based production and distribution company that produces original TV movies and scripted TV series—where he brokers major content deals and has executive produced a variety of TV movies including A Christmas Frequency, The Recipe Files and Sappy Holiday.



Previously, Kirkpatrick served as the Senior Vice President of North American Sales & Business Development for the London-based NENT Studios UK where he oversaw international television distribution deals on a variety of programs including BBC1's The Cry, Channel4's Shameless and ITV's Doc Martin and Manhunt.

He is the author of the books: (i) Writing for the Green Light: How to Make Your Script the One Hollywood Notices, (ii) Introduction to Media Distribution: Film, Television and New Media (now in its second edition) and (iii) Mastering the Pitch: How to Effectively Pitch Your Ideas to Hollywood.

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# Message from the President

BY CLAIR BRETT



A June love letter and thank you note to all those who have done the hard things that created a space for those who came after.

June in my yard is full of all the plants my grandmother planted when she moved into this house 77 years ago. They all have to be tough because summer in New England is short and these plants have braved long months of inhospitable temperatures and weather in order to bloom for maybe four weeks. I am in awe every time I see an iris pop up in the spring only to be gone as quickly as it bloomed, but I smile because I know that one flower also will create another bloom, and even more blooms for the next year.

Why am I rambling about flowers in New England? Because when I think about the obstacles romance authors have had to face in order for me to be here is nothing less than resilience and bravery. And today, to look at the writers who write about all sorts of relationships and love to bring characters to the forefront that help readers be able to find stories that represent them, I am just as in awe.

As an old English teacher, I always felt that fiction was a better teacher of human emotions than any class I could teach. And, when the reader can resonate and see themselves in the world and lives of the characters it gives them a mirror to hold on to their own ideas and ideologies. But as important when a reader is introduced to a character that is unfamiliar it gives that reader a chance to increase their empathy for how that person moves through their life and how the world around them impacts them.

From those first women who dared write about female sexuality, independence, and emotional needs to those writers today who are writing about love stories that look at all the ways love stories unfold, writers who are willing to push back on conventional ideas and push the door a little wider for more writers to step into the spotlight, I commend you.

The more open the genre becomes; it makes all of our stories' worlds more diverse and realistic to the world we live in today.

So, if you are standing up today, please know, I am rooting for you. I am buying your books; I am telling everyone they should be reading these books! Without the trailblazers to kick down the doors none of us would be here. Thank you and I love you.

— Clair

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# News & Updates

## BITE-SIZED INFO ON THE INDUSTRY

### PUBLISHING

#### U.S. Audiobook Sales Hit \$2 Billion in 2024

*Publishers Weekly*

The audiobook market in the United States continues steadily growing, with revenue increasing by 9%, to \$2 billion, in 2023, according to the Audio Publishers Association, which published data from its annual sales survey today. The sales survey, conducted by Toluna Harris Interactive, incorporates data from 27 publishers, including Audible, Hachette Audio, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster, among others.

In addition, the APA has released highlights from its 2024 consumer survey, carried out by Edison Research, which showed that 52% of U.S. adults, or nearly 149 million Americans, have listened to an audiobook. The survey also found that 38% of American adults listened to an audiobook in the last year, up from 35% reported in 2023.

[Read More.](#)

#### At Hearing, Appeals Court Appears Skeptical of Injunction Blocking Iowa's Book Ban Law

*Publishers Weekly*

In Minnesota on Tuesday, a three-judge panel of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Paul heard oral arguments in the state of Iowa's bid to overturn a December 2023 injunction blocking parts of its controversial book banning law, SF 496. And it was a rough ride for the plaintiffs.

[Read More.](#)

#### 'Imbalances still remain' when it comes to Black authors in the bestsellers' lists

*The Bookseller*

Publishing and promoting a diverse range of authors to reflect society has continued to be a priority in the UK book trade over the past few years, but "imbalances" remain despite the industry's efforts. Independent booksellers have raised concerns about whether the publishing process helps books by Black authors early in their careers to reach readers, and succeed commercially, both across adult and children's publishing.

The top 1,000 bestselling authors of last year sold a combined 98.5 million units for £763.9m, according to Nielsen BookScan's Total Consumer Market (TCM) data. The Bookseller has identified 23 Black authors among the top 1,000, with the sales of their books adding up to a total of £11.2m.

[Read more.](#)

#### Sights and Insights from the 2024 U.S. Book Show

*Publishers Weekly*

May 22 saw the U.S. Book Show's most successful iteration yet. In case you missed it - or if you're ready to relive it-we've rounded up some highlights and takeaways from all the panels.

[Read More.](#)



## Some Publishers Begin to Add AI Language to Contracts

### *Publishers Lunch*

As publishers continue to experiment with generative AI for in-house processes, three of the big five publishers—Penguin Random House, Hachette Book Group, and Macmillan—have begun including language surrounding AI in their contracts. These three publishers have boilerplate language available stating that the publisher will not license or use an author's work to train AI without the author's express permission—a win for agents and the Authors Guild, which updated their model contract with an AI clause last year. In many cases, the new language is not standard to the publishers' contracts, but will be added if an author or agent asks [...]

[Read more.](#)



# publisheralley

## Member Benefit

Publisher Alley is a web-based sales reporting tool that includes all of the sales and inventory data from Baker & Taylor. Baker & Taylor is the world's largest book distributor! We work with publishers to provide their book products to all markets. Publisher Alley allows authors to see what titles libraries are buying on a daily basis. Publisher Alley is the BEST tool available for analyzing sales on your titles and competitive titles by subject area, sales level, publication date, price point, reviews, author affiliations, interdisciplinary identifiers and sales channel. Full bibliographic data, including cover images and table of contents is available for all titles.

Book sales data serves several needs:

- Easily produce market research for book proposals, based on sales of comparable titles. Approach the right publishers for each project.
- Evaluate the potential of projects for self-publication: learn what sells in which markets, and at what price points.
- Locate expert authors as sources for newspaper or magazine stories, or identify trends related to world events.

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# Chapter Spotlight: Southern Magic

BY CATHY MCDAVID



## Spotlighting RWA chapters

Hello from the Magicians of Southern Magic! The [Southern Magic chapter](#) (#178) is based in Birmingham, Alabama, and was established in December 1997. Our name is derived from the nickname for Birmingham, “Magic City,” which the city earned because of its growth between 1881 and 1920. We strive to promote excellence in romantic fiction through educational opportunities to improve both our members’ writing and their marketing skills. Those educational opportunities include everything from individuals sharing their experiences to more formal workshops with experts in various fields.

We’re a friendly and supportive bunch of romance writers. Our members include those working to be published for the first time as well as multipublished and award-winning members.

We strongly believe in sharing our breadth and depth of knowledge and experience to provide continuing support for each other. More than that, we believe in being available to answer questions, resolve issues, and to comfort and celebrate with each other. We recognize that many questions can be answered by searching on the internet. You can’t build a network, a community, or a friendship solely by searching the internet, though. Getting together has proven to be very important in ways we hadn’t realized until the recent pandemic separated us, forcing the chapter online only for a year. Being able to come together again is a huge relief!

Chapter member benefits include the camaraderie of in-person meetings, chapter-sponsored workshops, an annual writing retreat, scholarship opportunities (i.e., for RWA’s Pen to





Paper program), and networking opportunities to expand your personal contacts through volunteering. The less-quantifiable benefits of membership include the connections and friendships you'll make and, hopefully, come to depend upon over time. While some of us have been members of the chapter for a long time, others have just joined but still are reaping these benefits at each meeting.

We meet the first Saturday of each month at 10:30 a.m. in the large Meeting Room upstairs at the North Shelby County Library.

For more information, please visit [www.southernmagic.org](http://www.southernmagic.org) or email our president, Betty Bolté, at [president@southernmagic.org](mailto:president@southernmagic.org).

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*Are you a chapter leader and would like your chapter featured in the RWR? Email [info@rwa.org](mailto:info@rwa.org).*



FIND YOUR RWA  
**CHAPTER**



# THE DIAMOND HEART®

*The Diamond Heart Award for Excellence in Published Romance Writing*

# THE GOLDEN HEART®

*The Golden Heart Award for Excellence in Pre-published Romance Writing*

## Contests Open to Submissions!

The submission period is now open for the highly anticipated Golden Heart Award and Diamond Heart Award. Both RWA members and non-members are invited to submit a single entry in the initial submission period. If you have already submitted one entry, you are now welcome to enter a second submission for consideration.

Learn more about the criteria and eligibility for the **Golden Heart Award** and **Diamond Heart Award** on the RWA website.

The Diamond Hearts Awards are open to both RWA members and non-members who have published a romance novel or novella in 2021, 2022, or 2023.

The Golden Hearts Awards are open to RWA members who have not accepted a publishing contract for or self-published a work of original fictional narrative prose of 20,000 words or more under any pen name.

To ensure a smooth and fair competition, we have set the initial entry cap at 90 for the Golden Heart Award and 240 for the Diamond Heart Award. But don't worry if you don't make it in right away! If we reach our entry caps, we will establish a waitlist. As our dedicated judges complete training, we will pull entries from the waitlist in the order they were received. This means everyone has a fair chance to participate in the Golden Heart Awards and the Diamond Heart Awards.

Visit [rwacontest.org](https://rwacontest.org) to register for the contests and submit your work today!



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# The Writer As Reader — Can This Marriage Be Saved?

BY JANET BUTLER

More often than not, writers start out as avid readers. We read something wonderful, something that transports us out of our everyday existence, and we want to give that feeling to someone else — or just plain enjoy it again and again ourselves. (As Benjamin Disraeli so elegantly put it, “When I want to read a good book, I write one.”)

Therefore, we begin from the point of being already awash in stories, so it becomes very natural for us to start thinking of variations on tales we read. Or, we see a TV program that we wish had ended differently, and we think about improving it. (Enter “fanfic”!)

Equally often, we begin to write because strange tales, things no one ever told us, bounce around between our ears and need to get out. We make stuff up — and quickly learn that if we do it under the guise of “creative writing” for a classroom exercise, we don’t get in trouble for it!

But when we start to write, sometimes, something else happens.

Sometimes, we lose the joy of reading for its own sake.

This doesn’t happen overnight. It creeps up on us, usually as we learn more about the craft. Often we notice it first when we go back to one of the

keepers on our shelves, ready to enjoy it anew — only this time around, it seems “flat.” Or we buy a new book, and we start to notice all the little nitpicky missteps that never seemed to “be there” before.

Note that I’m not talking about mistakes everyone hates, such as bad grammar, awful spelling, or changing characters’ names. The weaknesses that start to steal our joy are more detailed — some of the dozens of things that we as newbies learn you’re “not supposed to do,” but this book does anyway.

And we sigh. We feel “spoiled,” somehow. Kind of like we used to feel when “forced” to read certain things in school. Only this is worse, because these books are ones we selected



ourselves, books we loved, books we decided to keep around as old friends. Only now, we're seeing the "old" in the old friend. We're seeing the wrinkles and the spots and the imperfections, and they bother us in a way they never did before we started doing this ourselves.

Before long, we're echoing the (unfortunately) familiar lament, "When you become a writer, you won't be able to read for pleasure anymore."

The first time I heard this, I thought it was one of the saddest things a writer could ever say.

I still do.

Think about it. The profession you went into because you *loved* words, and you *loved* stories, and you *loved* the idea of creating something out of nothing...now, isn't fun to participate in "just" as a spectator anymore. This isn't limited to people who are "in the big time" (translation: on a bestseller list), either. It's everywhere. And it's a shame.

I would propose, however, that it doesn't have to happen. It's not black or white, one or the other. We *can* both write *and* still enjoy reading. We *can* still find books that are sheer entertainment — and don't have us gritting our teeth the whole time, thinking, "I could have done that better."

Will we still think that sometimes? Yep. But is it a given, across the board, forever? Most emphatically not.

So how do you keep the two separate? How do you turn off your "inner writer" long enough to lose yourself in a book, just like in the "good old days"?



Here are a few suggestions:

### 1. Sample Something New from the Smorgasbord.

Years ago, I was at an opera cast party at the home of my voice teacher and his bride. As we ate paella and sipped wine, some very nice jazz played in the background, and one of the party guests said to our hostess, "Gosh, Bec, I didn't know you were into jazz."

To which our hostess — with her Master's in voice — replied, "You know why that's on? Because I like it. I don't know anything technical about it, and I don't want to know anything technical about it. That way, I can just enjoy it."

The same goes for your reading habits. You can become an "expert" in a genre to the point where, suddenly, nothing seems fresh or fun anymore. So get out of that genre box and play a bit in another one — one you don't know anything about. You'll come at a story in that unfamiliar territory with fresh, unsophisticated eyes, the same way you came at the very first book you ever read and loved. If that sounds like "fun...it is.



## 2. Don't Mix Business with Pleasure.

If you've always loved to "recreationally read" tucked in bed, resist the temptation to do any writing there. You'll cross your inner wires, and your brain won't know if it's supposed to be "working" or "resting." Keep your "sit back and relax" places sacrosanct, and your To-Be-Read piles for those purposes *separate* from anything devoted to the craft and/or learning about your own genre.

You probably have enough bookcases or shelves for two entirely different collections of books. So use them. Keep your "work" books and tools away from the bedside or the recliner or the world's greatest couch. Save the soft, cushy spots for soft, cushy reading...something you can look forward to like a new box of chocolates.



## 3. Cut Everybody a Little Slack. Including Yourself.

The moment you start to write, you're bombarded with advice. It's well-intentioned, but make no mistake: it gives "tough love" advocates a run for their money. And some of the deadliest advice you'll get is that there are certain Big Name Authors you'll want to emulate, versus others who "aren't worth bothering with."

Trouble is, there's no real truth or substance to that advice. It isn't even craft, really. It's just opinion. But it's easy to forget that when you're trying hard to learn from "people who know." So when you try to read the "hot" authors and you don't like one (or more) of them, you start to panic. Maybe there's something wrong with you. Maybe you really don't know good writing from bad writing. Maybe...maybe...maybe...

Maybe, instead, it's time to ease up on everyone.

Including yourself.

Have you loved every book you ever picked up? Of course not. Did you feel guilty about it when you were "just" a reader? No? Then relax, and quit putting unnecessary pressure on yourself. Lots of other people will love those multi-selling authors; they won't go hungry if you don't. And, yes, this means you're more than free not to finish a book you dislike. Even if it's by the world's number-one sensational new author.

The best side effect of letting go in this manner? It keeps you out of the trap of pretending to like something you hate. You'll avoid turning reading from a splendid escape into an "assignment" or a "duty." Remember those required reading lists from school? Yeah. They didn't make you love

books then; they won't do it any better now, either. So toss that expectation...and then go to your own personal shelf and find those people whose work you in fact still do love. Don't worry. They're still worth spending time with — because you say so. Which is the only reason you need.

I've been a writer for over forty years, and a reader for thirty years longer than that. And I still check out stacks of books from the library for the sheer adventure of sitting down with a new "escape." If you've lost the knack of enjoying this,

have patience with yourself and try one or more of these simple exercises above — preferably from a comfy spot on the couch, with a cup of hot chocolate or a glass of wine nearby, with your feet up and your schedule clear.

Then...watch what happens.

See you in a couple of hours!

## Want to write for the Romance Writers Report?

Submit your pitch and earn up to \$500 if your article is selected and published.

[Click here to submit your pitch!](#)

The Romance Writers Report Committee seeks articles for all levels and tracks of writing. We welcome submissions from beginner to expert authors, and aim to include a diverse array of subject matter expertise, including craft, industry, marketing, business, and more. While articles of all themes are welcome, here are some areas that will be given specific focus in upcoming issues:

- *July 2024 - Conferences (submit by May 31)*
- *August 2024 - Research (submit by June 30, 2024)*
- *September 2024 - Plotting (submit by July 31, 2024)*
- *October 2024 - NaNoWriMo (submit by August 31, 2024)*
- *November 2024 - Time Management (submit by September 30, 2024)*
- *December 2024 - Writing Goals (submit by October 31, 2024)*





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# Deep POV: The Importance of Perception in World Building

BY ROMY SUMMER

About a million years ago, when I was still bright-eyed and naïve and killing time until I could get into film school, I did a semester of philosophy at university. I had no clue what philosophy was really about or what kinds of crazy ideas I was opening myself up to – but it turned out to be mind-blowing for eighteen-year-old me. Sadly, after all these years, there's only one thing I still remember from that course: Renaissance philosopher René Descartes' theory of perception. He's best known for originating the famous saying, "Cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am), but, for me, the bit that has stuck with me through the years is how he reached that famous conclusion.

Bear with me, this is about writing, I promise!



Basically, Descartes' theory started as an attempt to answer the eternal questions of "What am I?" and "Do I really exist?" His argument is that what we perceive with our senses cannot be proven to exist beyond reasonable doubt, as our senses cannot be trusted.

To demonstrate the limitations of our senses, Descartes contemplated a piece of wax – its texture, size, shape, and smell. When he moved the wax toward a flame, those characteristics changed. As the wax melted, it changed size, shape, texture and even its smell. His senses were perceiving something completely different, but the wax was still a piece of wax. Descartes' conclusion was that it was not his senses that were grasping the characteristics of the wax, but rather his thoughts *about* the wax. "Thus what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgement, which is in my mind." His conclusion was that, in order to perceive the wax's true nature, he could not use his senses. He could only use his mind.

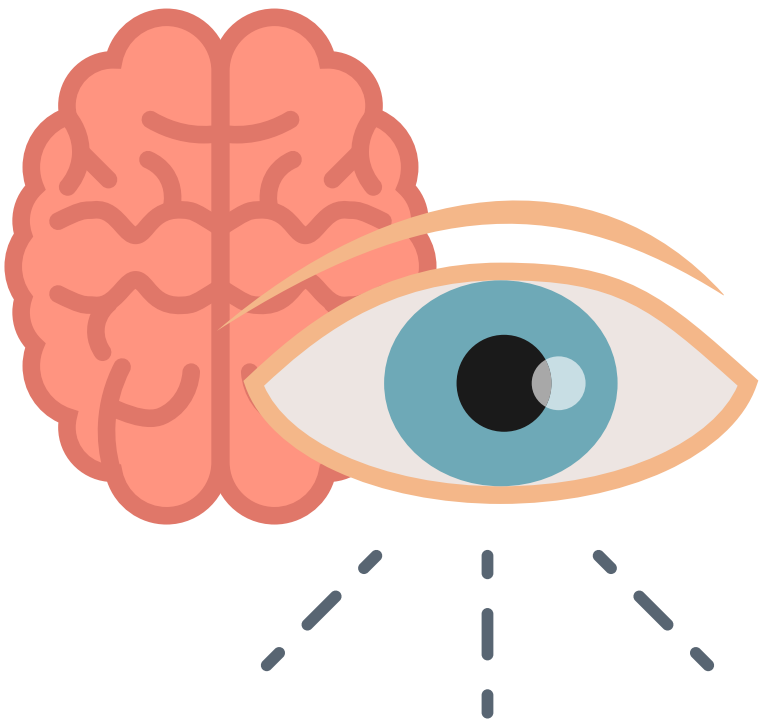
With me so far?

Descartes argued that, if our senses cannot be trusted, we can't even be sure our own bodies exist, since we only perceive them through our senses. The only thing we really know for sure, is that we're thinking *thoughts* about our bodies. The only thing we can be sure exists beyond a reasonable doubt is our own thoughts. Hence, the act of thinking proves we exist and "I think, therefore I am."

If your head wants to explode, you're not alone. And you're probably also not alone in wondering: How does any of this apply to writing?

If we accept that what Descartes wrote five centuries ago is true, then what we think about the world around us is more important than what our senses perceive. When we apply this principle to our characters, we're essentially writing Deep POV.

Often, I see beginner writers catalogue what their characters' are sensing of their world (usually with a heavy emphasis on the sense of sight), rather like William Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night*: "Item, two lips indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth." But simply giving us an inventory or checklist of items the character perceives can make the POV feel shallow, and distances the reader from living the character's experience.



To truly immerse your reader in your character's world, you need to show the character thinking about their world. It's not what they are perceiving that is important, but rather what they think about it.

Let's compare two examples, to illustrate how the character's thoughts can add depth to description.

The first example is from *This Rough Magic* by Mary Stewart, published in 1964 (back before Deep POV became as popular as it is today). *"The bay was small and sheltered, a sickle of pure white sand holding back the aquamarine sea, and held in its turn by the towering backdrop of cliff and pine and golden-green trees. My path led me steeply down past a knot of young oaks, straight on to the sand. I changed quickly in a sheltered corner, and walked out into the white blaze of the sun."*

That description is beautiful, isn't it? All those lovely colors are very evocative – but there is no judgment in the description. What does the POV character feel about this place? Does she feel comfortable and familiar or a little out of place in a foreign land? Does she feel soothed or energized by her surroundings? Finally, do we learn anything about the character from the way she views the world around her? No, we don't.

Contrast that description with this one, written in Deep POV, from Sonali Dev's *Recipe for Persuasion* (HarperCollins, 2020):

*"The mosaic floors needed a good buffing, the velvet jacquard on the chairs was frayed in places, and the teakwood tables could use a coat of varnish, but as she wiped and scrubbed, everything got a little brighter and took on the familiar gleam of long-owned artifacts. New things were overrated anyway."*



Yes, it's an inventory of the setting, but in this case it works. Notice how these few sentences go beyond painting a picture to show the POV character's judgment of the décor? We understand from this description that the character loves this familiar place, and, from that direct thought in the last sentence, we can also sense her mood in this moment: a little wistful for the past, a little defensive of the present shabbiness. It is this judgment of her surroundings that adds depth to the way the readers perceive both the character and the setting.

So often when we teach Deep POV, we tell writers to "Show, don't Tell," to reduce dialogue tags, to avoid labelling emotions, and to cut filter words (felt, heard, saw, etc) – and those are all excellent techniques that you absolutely should use in your writing – but I believe that to truly immerse your reader in your story, the best technique is to view your entire story through the POV character's judgments. Maybe not in every paragraph, or you'd have an epic thousand page novel, but often enough that the reader

never doubts how the POV character perceives their world.

When your POV character enters a new setting, what do they think of it – with anxiety, fear, comfortable familiarity, anticipation, admiration, or disdain? When they witness an action, do they approve or disapprove? When they meet a new character, what is their first impression? When Mr. Tall, Dark and Handsome arrives on the page for the first time, don't just tell us he has brown hair, chocolate eyes and broad shoulders. Show us whether your POV character thinks he's yummy enough to lick, a dumb jock, a cuddly cinnamon roll, or arrogant and quite frankly annoying, as Lizzie Bennet thought of Mr. Darcy?

When you're in copy edit stage, perhaps on your second, third (or even fourth) draft, dedicate one complete read-through of your manuscript to checking that your POV character's judgments of the world around them are clear and coloring all the descriptions.

It'll add a level of depth to your character's viewpoint and your story that your readers will thank you for.



## RWA Writer Service List

It no longer matters if an author works with a publisher or not, they still have to have their book edited, promoted on social media, advertised, and so much more. Since every writer wants help, RWA's Writer Services List offers members a single location to find the support team they need for a great book with a long shelf life.

RWA's website annually garners more than 350,000 sessions and nearly one million page views, of which 79 percent are new users. As an established trade association with a growing membership, RWA's Writer Services List is the perfect place for focused advertising to those who need your services the most: authors.

**[Click here to learn more.](#)**

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# Write Your ‘Destination Romance’ TV Movie Script Today!

BY SCOTT KIRKPATRICK

Picture it: an ‘almost’ first kiss exiting a charming Italian gelato shop; a flirty meet/cute in a French vineyard; or an unexpected secret romance with a Royal Prince (travelling incognito of course) on the beaches of a tropical paradise.

These are the moments that make a ‘Destination’ Romance TV movie spring to life (and truly allow viewers to escape, even if only for 90 minutes or so).

Ever flirted with the idea of writing a screenplay with such scenes? Perhaps you’ve already taken a crack at screenwriting but are seeking to expand your romance portfolio? Consider a ‘Destination’ themed romance for your next project.

In this article, I’ll give you the high-level rules as well as some insider tips to help you craft a solid Destination romance TV movie spec script.

Before we dive in, please note that I’m not a screenwriter or novelist; I’m a film/TV executive that manages the financing, production and distribution of TV movies (the boring ‘business stuff’ that gets movies made). I enjoy pulling back the curtain and sharing how the film/TV business works in order to give writers and filmmakers a leg-up in their professional careers (to help give guidance that can level up their career goals). Although I’m not actively involved

in the writing of the films I manage, I do work closely with writers—optioning romance novels and providing script notes all while balancing network/client needs—to pin down solid TV movie romances for a variety of broadcasters and platforms.

Everything I’m sharing with you is based on real-world business needs to give insight into how best to write, pitch and present your Destination romance TV movie script.



## What Makes a GREAT ‘Destination’ Romance?

A Destination romance is a light-hearted ‘feel-good’ romance story that follows a female protagonist—generally living in a fast-paced urban environment—who is serendipitously

‘forced’ to travel to an unexpected and seemingly exotic/beautiful location. When she arrives, she’s introduced to a completely new world all while having an unexpected meet/cute moment with her inevitable ‘meant to be’ love interest. (Not only will audiences sense their instant chemistry together, but they’ll also notice he’s the ‘guy’ on the movie’s poster.) However, there’s a catch; either (a) he hasn’t been entirely truthful about his full background and/or (b) there’s some type of ‘burden’ on his shoulders that he hasn’t fully conquered. Revelations of this scenario spin their destined romance into a downward spiral. Of course, in the end he apologizes for his lack of transparency (and she realizes he had justifiable reasons for withholding the intel [a revelation generally made clear through a friend or insightful acquaintance]); he returns to her with some unrealistically visual overture—that makes viewing hearts swoon—and they kiss. The end.

This above loose outline—coupled with a beautiful poster and playful/tongue-in-cheek title—and you’ve got a solid project on your hands!



Seems simple enough, but the devil is in the details... So, how do we get from A to B on this?

#### Four Un-Written Rules

##### Rule #1: The ‘Meet/Cute is Everything

Romance movies live and breathe based upon the strength and originality of the ‘meet/cute’ moment. First, the meet/cute should be natural yet unexpected; fate has brought these characters together and you must structure the meet/cute to reflect these characters crashing into each other (sometimes literally!). Second, a layer of conflict makes it fun; since these characters did not intend to meet, sometimes it’s more fun when they—on the surface—have a conflict between them (allowing their dialogue to contrast their emotion); this allows for sharp dialogue with a layer of flirtation woven in. And third, the meet/cute works well when it’s slightly embarrassing for the female character (e.g., she’s just had coffee spilled on her or this ‘can-do-everything-myself’ isn’t able to change a car tire); this again allows for a bit of surface-level frustration or contention in the words spoken while granting the talent ways to weaving in flirtation and gazing glances.

The meet/cute is what changes the course of the story for our protagonist and therefore needs to be built in a way that captivates us all. Picture a high-powered female real estate executive looking to be partner at her big-city firm; she heads to a small destination location to acquire a plot of land per her bosses instructions only to find a very stubborn and resistant owner who annoyingly is ruggedly handsome and seems unmoved by money (this scenario allows for contention, play on words flirtation and an opportunity to recurringly communicate while opening our heroine’s eyes to a new take on life).



She could even have an embarrassing moment when they first meet—that humanizes her before she’s able to put on her ‘tough city’ mask.

Build the conflict, find the perfect meet/cute and build the story around that conflicting interaction.

### **Rule #2 – Locations Matter**

The location needs to be a dream vacation type environment. Think gorgeous tropical island, a European castle, lavender fields, vineyards; the types of places an audience member would want to escape to for a vacation—or a lifetime—if money wasn’t an option. For clarity; a destination romance is NOT an adventure film. (Adventure films need more rugged environments, rough terrain and dirt/mud; we want to avoid all of that.)

### **Rule #3: Keep the Budget in Mind**

Many screenwriting books advise novice screenwriters to ‘write from the heart’ and ignore real world factors like budgets, logistics and cost. In my humble yet experienced position, those books are completely wrong. The individuals actually reading your script with a view to acquire, develop and produce new films very much care about costs and logistics.

The way to keep costs reasonable is to focus on a few basic parameters:

- Keep the characters limited (maybe 8-to-10 total roles; 4 of which are very prominent, 2-4 are recurring supports and the others are ‘sporadically pop up throughout’);
- Keep the script under 100 pages (aim for 94 pages; at 1-page per minute, that allows enough footage with potential edits should scenes need to be excised during editing);

- Keep the locations reasonable; you can write for Paris, but have the meet/cute NOT take place someplace difficult to shoot (e.g., NOT in the Louvre or atop the Eiffel Tower—where permits are expensive and complicated to obtain); instead, small quaint cafes and cute locations that ‘only a local would know’. Side note, most movies that ‘take place in Paris’ are actually shot in places like Romania or Bulgaria to drastically reduce costs; a little French signage intercut with stock footage of the Eiffle Tower is what ‘transports’ the viewer to the City of Lights. Sorry to break the illusion 🙄.

### **Rule #4: Keep Things PG-Rated**

We all know how babies get made and understand that different couples engage in consenting activities at different stages after they first encounter one another. But a ‘Destination’ romance in the TV movie world isn’t a vehicle to shock people with graphic or blatant sexual content. I fully accept that certain media outlets—such as Netflix, Max, Showtime among others—have the freedom to showcase content more realistically. But for a TV movie, the budgets are tight and the buyers—who ultimately select one script over the other—tend to lean toward the cookie-cutter formula: ‘meet/cute’ + chemistry + will they?/won’t they? = a climax of a first big kiss at the end. In truth, diving in too early shifts a romance into a drama (it’s already been established that they ‘will’) and a drama is a bad place to be for a screenwriter intending to sell their scripts (once a project is deemed as a ‘drama’, it quickly increases its odds for rejection simply because dramas require bigger cast names and therefore become much higher costing projects (with very limited programming slots)). Keep it clean, keep the story all about the

‘chemistry build-up and the only ‘drama’ is the reveal that Mr. Right hasn’t been 100% honest (see above in our Destination romance ‘definition’).

### **Additional Thoughts: A ‘Destination Romance’ is NOT a Rom-Com**

These genre headings may seem interchangeable, but to the executives and producer’s to whom you’ll be pitching a ‘Destination Romance’ and a Rom-Com are worlds apart.

A ‘Destination Romance’ is a TV-movie (and will be produced at a TV movie budget level with TV movie talent). This means the doors to getting your screenplay acquired, adapted and greenlit into a feature film are greater. A ‘Rom-Com’—by contrast—is a theatrical movie with a \$10 million or more budget and A-list talent leading the way; also, Rom-Com’s are generally adaptations of popular books (think NY Times bestsellers); this means the doors to getting a Rom-Com off the ground are extremely complicated, political and essentially closed off to those without the career and credentials in the space.

If your aim is to write \$10 million-plus level Rom-Coms, start by writing a few modestly-budgeted Destination Romance scripts to get some credits and build your reputation as a screenwriter. If you prefer writing smaller Destination Romance scripts—and skipping all the Hollywood politics at the studio level—then go for it; many writers enjoy the Destination romance genre and have built lucrative careers churning out script after script at the TV movie level (easily making low-to-mid six figures a year with a script-per-month).

### **Story Mechanisms that Work**

I’ve seen the most success from the following narrative structures:

The Incognito Royal – This sub-genre creates a chemistry-perfect romance where one character is actually a royal traveling incognito (attempting to escape their ‘royal’ duties back home in [insert fictitious country name]. Obviously a ‘fantasy-come-true’ scenario, but this concept works very well and offers very fun opportunities for both meet/cute moments, amazing wardrobe scenes (think Cinderella style dress moments) as well as fantastic ‘conflict’ points (notably, when its revealed our ‘royal’ has been incognito all this time as well as when our royal character must return back to their life of royalty-positioned responsibility).



Forced to Travel for Work – Young female professional carving out a successful career in the big city is suddenly obligated (by means of professional advancement) to travel to a location she doesn't want to go to. BUT, making this a successful business trip will elevate her professional status which she's excited for. On this trip, she lands someplace that feels like a fairy tale. And she meets Mr. Right early on—with an unexpectedly awkward meet/cute. Mr. Right could be the target of her business obligations (and she's now having second thoughts of 'clobbering his local business') or he's a secret prince travelling incognito and needs to keep a low profile, which makes her career obligations impossible. Bottom line, while on this journey, she has the realization that maybe work isn't everything and that maybe she's lost sight of who she really is (and it took a forced escape to someplace magical to truly realize it).

Returning Home for Christmas – Yes, the Christmas Romance film is alive and well (and deserves its own article), but as a high-level story, just trust that a plotline following professional city girl returning home—or to a small rural area similar to her hometown—is a ripe opportunity for an impromptu romance. You can certainly play on this a bit (flipping it around so that it takes place entirely in a rural environment, etc.) but the heart of it needs to be that warm, cozy small town feel that makes a Christmas Romance feel so visually charming. Upon her arrival, she has a fun meet/cute with Mr. Right and the games are on. Add in some winter playful scenes (hot cocoa, ice skating and maybe a snowball fight) and you've got a perfect Christmas movie.

### **Prince or Princess?**

Although the secret 'Royal' character traveling

incognito could be male or female (e.g., a Prince or a Princess), audience engagement ratings and revenue reports indicate audiences prefer—by a long shot!—a commoner everyday female falling in love with an male Prince escaping his royal responsibilities back home. [Sidebar—You can still write a Princess-protagonist movie, but make it about a young everyday commoner who somehow 'discovers' that she's actually a Princess (and that she simply never knew about it); this structure allows you to have a bit of both BUT generally works best as a 'tween' movie.]

### **Conclusion**

The Romance genre isn't going anywhere. The industry depends on them, they're ratings drivers and they have minimal costs to produce. Our side of the fence is always on the lookout for talented screenwriters who can master the destination romance genre, so do take the plunge with confidence that there is absolutely a receptive audience of film executives on the other side looking for fresh takes on the genre.

Happy writing!





# Contests & Conferences

## CHAPTER CONTESTS

### Chesapeake Romance Writer's 2024 Rudy Writing Contest

Sponsor: Chesapeake Romance Writers

Description: In honor of the best-selling, award-winning author and long-time member of CRW, **Judy McCoy**, we want you to finish your book. Let

our contest light your inspirational fire.

Dates: June 1, 2024 - September 1, 2024

More information: [Click Here](#)

### Hearts Through History 2024 Romance Through The Ages Contest

Sponsor: Hearts Through History Romance Writers

Application fee: \$20 for HHRW members / \$25 for non-members

Dates: April 1st – June 30th, 2024

More information: [Click Here](#)

### The Big Apple Contest

Sponsor: RWA NYC

Eligibility: This contest is opened to all published and unpublished authors.

The entry should be the first chapter of a romance that has not been published in any form. There is a limit of 25 pages.

Dates: July 1, 2024 - August 31, 2024

More information: [Click Here](#)

## ONLINE WORKSHOPS

### June Online Workshops

#### Hook Your Reader to Your Story

Sponsor: Hearts Through History Romance

Writers

Fee: HHRW Member \$10 | Non-member \$15

Date: Saturday, June 22, 2024; 11:00 AM Eastern

Presenter: Kathy Otten

FMI: [Click Here](#)

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*To have your chapter's contest, conference, or online workshop included in the RWR and on this web page, please send the pertinent information (following the format above) to [info@rwa.org](mailto:info@rwa.org).*

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# New Members

JOIN US IN WELCOMING THE PEOPLE WHO JOINED/REJOINED  
RWA IN MAY 2024

Laurel Blount

Wei Feng

Carole Ann Moleti

Whitney Theresa June Simonsen

Chris Patterson

Melanie L. Waterbury

Kayt Harris

Ronda L. Wells

Katie Woltman

E. Rose Lynn

Scarlette Gray White

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Kathryn Marie Roberts

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Ashleigh Sigmon

Kelly Walsh

Valerie Jones

Maisey Yates



*Welcome to RWA!*

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# Debut Authors & Milestones

**RWA congratulates the following authors on the publication of their first romance novel/novella**

**Nola Saint James:** *Anarchy at Almacks: A Story of Love at First Sight*, Regency Romance. Published by Nemeton Press on April 16, 2024.

**Elle M. Stewart:** *Taking Initiative*, Romantic Comedy. Self-published on June 25, 2024.

**Twila Mason:** *Piece by Piece*, Contemporary Romance. Published by Red Adept Publishing on May 28, 2024.

**Liz Beth Rose:** *Recycled Hearts*, Romance Suspense. Published by Rukia on October 10, 2023.

**Vivienne Baudlaire:** *The Disgraced Duke*, Historical Romance. Self-published on September 5, 2023.

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To submit your information for publication in the Debut Author column, complete the online form at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RWAdebutauthor>.

**RWA congratulates the following authors on reaching a milestone in their career:**

5 Books: Kathryn K. Murphy

- The Secret About Time
- Simply A Matter Of Time
- A Touch of Healing
- A Touch of Fire
- A Touch of Truth

10 Books: Krysten Lindsay Hager

- Dating the It Guy
- Next Door to a Star
- Competing with a Star
- True Colors
- Best Friends...Forever?
- Landry in Like
- Can Dreams Come True
- In Over Her Head: Lights, Camera, Anxiety
- Cecily in the City
- Stars in the City

10 Books: Jason Wrench

- 12 Days of Murder
- Till Death do us Wed
- Finding a Farmer
- Bewitched by the Barista
- Sanctuary for the Surgeon
- Catching the Composer
- Wolf Island
- Boy Bands and Bullets
- A Choreographed Coup
- Rhythmic Reclamation