

# LARA CONFIDENTIAL

The Newsletter of the Los Angeles Romance Authors Chapter of RWA®

March 2010

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\* Items with Authors Name Listed are Monthly Featured Articles

"Promoting Excellence in Romantic Fiction Through Education and Community



### Theme: Settings – Plot Happens

“When evil men plot, good men must plan. When evil men burn and bomb, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love.”  
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

### 1K A Day Challenge

The 1K A Day Challenge is a simple challenge: Work on 1,000 words a day of your Manuscript. That is only 4 Double Spaced Pages, and it includes Page Revisions. Even Better—*You Get 5 Days off a Month, so you only have to work on 25K Words to get Credit.* The following people achieved the Challenge in February:



#### Veronica Blade

28,042 Words  
321 PR = 80,250 Words

**108,292 Words**

#### Lynne Marshall

6,309 Words  
164 PR = 41,000 Words

**47,309 Words**



#### Maggie Marr

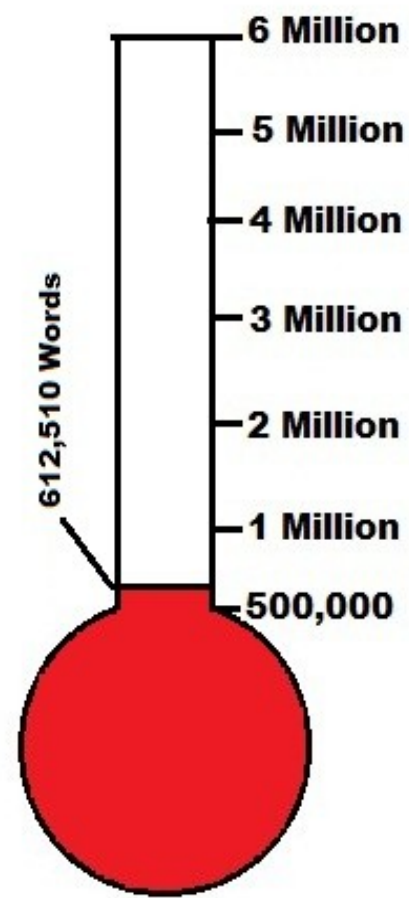
21,112 Words  
82 PR = 20,500 Words

**41,612 Words**

(Continued on page 2)



PR = Page Revisions



### What's With the Thermometer?

The Thermometer represents the LARA Chapter Challenge for all LARA Members to write 6 Million words in 2010... So start writing and let us know how you do each month!

# 1K A Day Challenge

(Continued)

(Continued from page 1)



**Erica Barton**  
7,583 Words  
126 PR = 31,500 Words  
**39,083 Words**



**Arlene Tellez**  
10,000 Words  
100 PR = 25,000 Words  
**35,000 Words**



**Dorrie Lloyd**  
37,933 Words  
0 PR = 0 Words  
**37,933 Words**



**Georgie Lee**  
30,000 Words  
0 PR = 0 Words  
**30,000 Words**

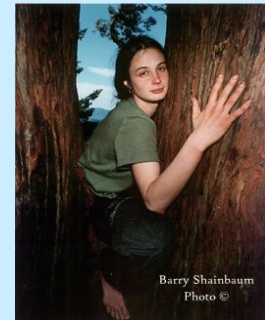
## WRITING PROMPT

Use the following prompt to write a paragraph (which no one will read but you). Bring the paragraph to the next meeting, show it at sign-in, and receive a drawing ticket. At the end of the meeting, a ticket will be drawn and the winner will receive a waiver certificate for their next LARA Meeting.

### The Prompt:

“Julia was not the type of woman one would expect to find in a redwood tree...”

(From the Book “Unstoppable Women” by Cynthia Kersey)



*Picture of Julia Butterfly*

## *FROM THE EDITOR—Making Things Worse*

When I was about ten years old, I was a romance writer. I didn't know it at the time, but I did know that I loved to make up stories, and they always had happy endings. I also knew that when I played Barbies with my friends, I would get so caught up in the romance between Ball Gown Barbie and Surfer Dude Ken, I wouldn't notice that my friends had often stopped playing to watch what was going on with my dolls. At the point when I did realize they were watching me, I would look up at them innocently and blurt, "What? Why aren't you playing?" They, of course, would quickly return to what they were doing, and I would go back to making my dolls do very naughty things. (What can I say—there was something wrong with me even then.)



At some point, my favorite aunt realized that I really had a passion for story telling. So one day out of the blue—it wasn't even a special occasion—she gave me a book that made such an impression, it remains to this day my favorite gift of all time. At ten years old, she gave me a small book—probably only 75 pages or so—called "What If?" and it was all about writing stories. I had never considered actually writing a story before that, but suddenly, the world was open to me. The possibilities of the stories I could tell made me look at books in a whole new way. And from that moment on, every book I read, I would judge. If a book was really bad, I would think, "I can do better than this. Why on Earth did *this* book even get published?"

If a book was good, it would quickly go into my collection and I would read it over and over until I had it memorized.

Anyway, the one piece of advice that really jumped out at me in that little pamphlet of writer's how-to-for-teens was this:

***To create an interesting plot, take a situation between your characters and make it worse. Because what really makes a story interesting is how the characters react to that situation and how they overcome it.***

Of course, this is paraphrased since the book is long gone. Somewhere between the dozens of times I've moved since then and actually becoming a writer, it disappeared and I've never been able to find a replacement copy. But I never forgot that advice. *Take a situation and make it worse.* Your heroine's down on her luck, losing her business and her home—hit her with a car too. Your hero has to prove his love to the heroine but doesn't know how—have a naked hooker end up in his bed...that's always fun. Or your villain has your hero half convinced that he has won the day—why not let your villain get the girl too...at least for a while. Because it's those little things that will really keep your reader turning the pages.

So in the spirit of taking something and making it worse—here's your March newsletter.



### *Did You Know...*

*Mary Balogh wrote her latest 100K word novel, "Precious Jewel" in two weeks—she liked the characters that much. But when she was done, she didn't think she could sell it, and she shelved it for years...until recently.*

*(And by the way, it's FABULOUS!)*



## *Upcoming LARA Events*

**March 21, 2010**

- **LARA Meeting**
- **Topic: Question and Answer Session with LARA Member Carol Hughes**
- **Speaker: Carol Hughes**

Come with your thinking caps on and ready to brainstorm. Carol Hughes will head a question and answer session that will help develop your "intriguing" and "sexy settings" for your story.

**March 22 - April 16, 2010**

- **Online Workshop**
- **Topic: Question and Answer session with LARA Member Carol Hughes**
- **Speaker: Carol Hughes**

DEEP STORY is the layers of techniques interwoven beneath the surface of all successful stories from HARRY POTTER to AVATAR. DEEP STORY is what will allow you as a writer to captivate and delight your readers just like Nora Roberts does. DEEP STORY is what will allow your characters to live on in the hearts and minds of your readers just as J.K. Rowling's do. DEEP STORY is what will allow you to make an indelible impression on readers just like Stephen King has been doing ever since CARRIE first went to her prom. (See Next

LARA meets once a month at the Barnes & Noble Bookstore in Encino. Guests are welcome to attend one meeting free. \$4.00 for members and \$8.00 for guests.

Coffee and Chat begins at 10:00 am. General meeting starts at 10:30 am.

**Barnes and Noble Booksellers**  
**16461 Ventura Boulevard**  
**Encino, CA 91436**

Page of this newsletter for More Details.)

**Enroll now! LARA Members \$15.00, Non-LARA Members \$20.00**

<http://www.lararwa.com/eclassshedule.html>

**May 15, 2010 (Saturday)**

- **Annual Workshop**
- **Topic: Full Day Warrior-Writer Workshop**
- **Speaker: Bob Mayer (bobmayer.org)**

Warrior-Writer is a one-of-a-kind Workshop focusing on you, the author. In the Warrior-Writer Workshop, I apply the battle-tested strategies of the Green Berets to the world of being a New York Times Best-Selling author. I've taught thousands of writers over the years, but this new and innovative program probes deeper than words on the page. It is designed to teach you, the writer, how to think, plan, and become the future best sellers the new age of publishing. The benefits you'll gain from this workshop will extend far beyond your writing and reach into all areas of your life making dreams a reality.

For More information about the Full Day Warrior-Writer workshop please visit <http://bobmayer.org/index.php?id=6#Warrior-Writer-Workshop>

**Location: Beverly Garland's Holiday Inn**  
**4222 Vineland Avenue**  
**North Hollywood, CA 91602-3399**

**Cost: Early Bird Special Until APRIL 5, 2010**

- \$75 for LARA members (if paid April 5 - May 5 \$85)
- \$80 for OCC, EVA & San Diego RWA members (if paid April 5 - May 5 \$90)
- \$85 for RWA members (if paid April 5 - May 5 \$95)
- \$95 for Non-members (if paid April 5 - May 5 \$110)
- ALL LARA Members may choose to make two or three payments via Pay Pal.

<http://www.lararwa.com/workshop.html>

## **ONLINE WORKSHOP: Crafting Your Deep Story**

### **“What Does Nora Roberts Know That You Don’t?”**

**Would You Like to Reach the Same Level in Your Own Writing Career? Then Come Learn How To Unlock the Simple Secrets Behind Every Best Seller and Blockbuster Film with Carol Hughes**

**LARA On-Line March 15 – April 15, 2010**

What does Nora Roberts, Stephen King, George Lucas (STAR WARS), Stephen Spielberg (E.T.), Terry Russo (SHREK/PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN), James Cameron (TITANIC/AVATAR) know about writing that makes them the mega stars that they are? How are they able to turn out the constant string of stories that they do while you are barely able to struggle to the final page of your current WIP? Why did TITANIC and AVATAR each gross over \$1 BILLION in ticket sales in only a matter of weeks? Are you interested in learning the secret techniques that each of these mega stars has in common? It’s not as hard as you think – not if you know the simple-to-master writing secrets that they know and haven’t shared with you.

Seasoned pro or beginning writer, pantsers or plotter – it doesn’t make any difference. You already know that writing takes a lot of hard work, perseverance, talent and a hearty dose of luck. Without the necessary writing tools to craft your wonderful story ideas into a finished work that people want to buy, all the hard work, talent, luck and perseverance in the world is useless without a solid, well-crafted story full of multi-dimensional characters to make your story come alive for every reader – or movie-goer. Do you know what the 18 scenes are that every story contains, no matter its length or genre? Do you know what impact your character’s mental gender has upon readers? Do you even know what your character’s mental gender is? Do you know how your character’s arc drives your story? Or how your story drives your character’s arc? Do you know the quick and easy way to create heart stopping dilemmas for your characters that drive your readers wild? Do you know what the 4 through-lines of every story is? Do you know how to weave them together?

Every successful story contains characters who come alive for the reader. Every successful story is built on a solid, easy-to-master, story structure that works every single time. Every successful story lives on in the hearts and minds of readers because their authors have mastered the simple secrets needed to turn them into writing super stars. And you can, too. Join us on March 15 and learn how to give Nora Roberts something to worry about.

**Enroll now! LARA Members \$15.00, Non-LARA Members \$20.00**

<http://www.lararwa.com/eclassshedule.html>



## The Plot Thickens

By Niki Chanel

Each generation brings with it a new approach to life. Their POV (point of view) is a collection of opinions that have been explored before them, but each generation wants to peel away another layer and find the *next* thing that is NOT socially acceptable, trying to be different than their parents in an effort not to repeat the ‘sins of their fathers’. It is an evolution of emotional and psychological politics and likely the process of becoming jaded.

Television, radio, travel, food, forms of communication and even our clothes are reliant on how quickly we can move from moment to moment. More kids are being diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) because they can’t keep their minds on one subject for an extended period of time, but the truth is that our world is growing faster every day and the rest of us are struggling to keep up.

Writers are no exception – they are required to hook their reader on the first page... better still in the first sentence! No more waiting for Godot... too slow.

Romance was once a story of boy-meets-girl and the deepening of their relationship. These days, if you don’t get these two into bed fairly quickly, you lose your readers.

Mysteries used to be “Who-done-it’s” but have developed into the “Why’d-they-do-it’s” and “How’d-they-do-it’s”. It takes readers too long to slog through hints that lead *only* to the discovery of the killer or thief. We all want more – and we want it quicker. To hold our attention today, there must be something more to sustain us on our journey to the solution of a story – more than just finding out *who* is the guilty party, otherwise it’s a “waste of time”. Chase scenes. Sex. Mayhem. That’s what gets all the publicity and makes the money; the details. That’s entertainment!

A writer today almost needs a formula to keep up the pace in order to finish “in time”. I could relate to Nicolas Schmerkin, this year’s Oscar winner for Best Animated Short: “It took, like, six years to make this 16 minute film, so I hope to come back here with a long feature film, in about 36 years.”

I have asked myself many times, “Exactly, what is this formula?” Through my own lessons I have cobbled together an answer for myself that is a bit like the kids of the digital age; I start a story the ADD way – quick and dirty and ‘add’ more later. I don’t worry too much about plot development – it seems to take care of itself... but see what you think.



1. The NOTES: Observations of life, story concepts, cool names and anecdotes I hear, get written in a notebook that I have with me all the time.
2. The CARDS: I draft the entire story in as few words as possible (to save time and preserve the energy of the story) onto 3X5 cards – one card, one scene. They are easy to handle and they force me to use fewer words. I can keep them in my pocket or purse and they’re rigid enough to write a note on without puncturing (good for on-the-spot note taking). I use the upper right corner for info like, say, Act I, II, climax etc. The upper left can be for the story’s title. An entire manuscript can be reduced to a pack of cards. I can even take a scene from a different manuscript and easily transfer it into my current WIP if it fits better in the new story.
3. I breathe life into the characters with physical and emotional descriptions. The five basic emotions help here:
  - Joy / happiness / contentment
  - Sadness / disappointment
  - Angry / frustration / jealousy
  - Fear / worry / guilt
  - Desire / lust
4. I flesh out the settings using the five senses:
  - Sight
  - Sound

(Continued on page 7)

## The Plot Thickens (cont)

(Continued from page 6)

- Smells
  - Speech
  - Sensations
7. GRID: I use a poster-board marked off in regular intervals where sticky notes can be applied to keep track of characters and action. (A marked cloth is better for traveling.) Laying the cards on the grid can reveal where the plot seems 'thin'. It helps keep dates consistent and indicates when and where to inject conflict. It's basically a method of keeping track of plot structure and timing.
8. The PIX: If the imagery doesn't come easily, there is always the Pix-Book; a notebook of photos, magazine clippings, internet collections, etc. that can help my inner eye see my story more clearly. Even ads and travel brochures can strike my fancy and help to congeal a landscape.
9. If all else fails I start with the ending and work backwards using the six baby steps, listed above.

All these tricks amount to building a mountain out of a molehill – with details. It also takes the drudgery out of the process and makes it fun. Once I have the story structure set up and my characters have faces and personalities I can start putting trouble in their lives to keep them from their goals. This is how and where my plots thicken - this is plot development.

Plot development is all about the details. Often those details come from those observations of daily life that I have in my notes. (Real life is truly stranger than fiction so it's a great source of inspiration.) If an author simply wrote: "The burglar stole the painting and the lovers kissed" no one would be interested. But if the thief was a cat-burglar the audience's collective 'ear' perks up – a detail has been added to help 'see' what exactly is going on. If it's actual cat's that are being stolen we have another visual and a pretty funny one, at that. Herding cats is not an easy job and this detail alone opens up a reader's imagination. Sometimes I even come up with a new story idea after putting in just a few plot details – details that, in truth,

belong to the character's development. To give an example, I needed a flawed heroine. I made a vague sketch of her personality and the character reminded me of a girlfriend from college.

I put the rudimentary idea on a card: "She sleeps around."

Later, I 'quirk up' the character: "Never knowing when the opportunity to sleep with the next young Adonis might pop up, she keeps her toothbrush dangling from the top button-hole of her shirt. *God, I love art schools!*"

My friend didn't want to be inconvenienced by having to leave her new beau to get her things and being that it was only a toothbrush; there was no commitment pressure on the guy. It also turned out to be an entertaining form of advertising for her.

Next, the character is looking for toothpaste in the bathroom of a new conquest and she finds something that complicates her relationship – a syringe.

As far as the story goes, I don't really need to know what she found... yet; but since the new prop came easily (and one should add conflict every step of the way), an entirely new 120 page science-based script of a plastic eating bacteria on a college campus came into being because the 'beau' was diabetic.

So, it's details that make all the difference. As long as I 'keep my eye on the prize' (the basic story line and the ending) I can continue adding "ornaments to my tree" and the plot seems to evolve on its own. If ever there is a slump, I change characters and settings and work on the details of a sub plot or secondary characters the same way - torturing my players with more obstacles and dreadful events. Maybe this isn't how Hollywood does it but it entertains *me!* Hey, if I'm not interested, I don't imagine my readers will be, either. If the journey is no fun, why take the trip?



# A WRITER'S TOOLS by Talia Clare—Basic Plotting Chart

If you would like this in an Excel sheet, email me at [etnsuz@yahoo.com](mailto:etnsuz@yahoo.com).

## Title of Your Book \_\_\_\_\_

### BASIC PLOT SKETCH

(Begin putlining your BASIC story concepts here. More details will be added later.)

<b>Premise / Elevator Pitch:</b> (What is the basic Premise of Your Book - the 2 to 3 line Pitch you would give an Agent or Editor in an Elevator? - You may want to do this last.)	
<b>Est. Length of Book:</b> (Word Count)	
<b># of Sparks:</b> (The Spark is the action in your book that changes the direction of the plot. It's the hook that begins the story; the revealed secret that changes the H/H relationship; the loss that deves-tates your character; and so on.)	
<b>Breakout Concepts that Anyone can Under-stand:</b> (What is the theme that will reach to the heart and soul of your reader?)	
<b>Beginning Story Spark:</b> (The Hook - where the story begins. Some people would say that this is where the H/H meet; I think it's the moment that forces a character out of their comfort zone and onto the road of their journey.)	
<b>Secondary Beginning Spark:</b> (This would be something like the first obstacle in their journey... the moment where something goes wrong and makes the character reevaluate.)	
<b>Middle Story Spark:</b> (This spark changes the whole direction of the story. It should be something your reader never saw coming - or your characters, for that matter.)	
<b>Secondary Middle Spark:</b> (This spark is optional - but if you use it - it should be the spark that makes everything start to go downhill. It is the spark that leads to the Black Moment.)	
<b>Black Moment:</b> (This is the moment where it seems all hope is lost - a happy ending will never happen because things are so awful, all your character wants to do is curl into a ball and cry.)	
<b>Ending Story Spark:</b> (Something has to happen that pulls the characters out of the Black Moment and leads them toward their Happily Ever After... That is THIS spark.)	

FROM THE O.C. (Other Chapters) -

MARY SHELLEY: BUILDING A STORY—By Jennifer Childres

The following article ran in the January 2010 issue of The Final Draft, the newsletter of Carolina Romance Writers in Charlotte, NC. Permission granted to sister chapters to forward or reprint with proper credit.

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Mary Shelley: Building a Story by Jennifer Childers

An idea takes root in your mind and you decide to make it a story. Ideas could come from a news story, trivia, or even a dream, as was the case with Mary Shelley. Like most of us, she had an idea and had to nurture this idea into a story.

It was a dark and stormy night (no, really) when Mary sat in the parlor with three friends on a bet. The four were bored and decided on a ghost story challenge. It is rumored the men teased her saying she was at a disadvantage as a woman, for she was unable to grasp the elements of horror.

She stared at a blank page for the longest time before remembering a conversation about Erasmus Darwin and the ideas he had about the possibility of returning a corpse or assembled body parts to life. It is said she had a waking dream which gave her the ideas for FRANKENSTEIN.

A plot seed needed nurturing to grow from there: A scientist would create life from the dead, in a lab, using his scientific skill. If she made an outline it might look like this:

- 1. Scientist creates a living being (story begins)
- His desire is to learn the mysteries of life and death and overcome them.
- He would have to rob graves to obtain body parts.
- Jail would be the penalty if he were caught. Stealth would be a must.

This would establish goal, motivation and conflict for the main character. From here, Shelley would have to decide how the scientist's (Dr. Frankenstein) decision affected himself and those around him.

Instead of the growling brain dead monster of many Frankenstein remakes, Shelley's monster was intelligent, multi lingual, and became a person with his own agenda.

- 2. He's created a monster (the story middle)
- The monster cannot be controlled.
- The monster has his own demands (wants).
- The monster proves a threat.

The monster wants a mate, the scientist is appalled. At first the scientist tries to escape the monster, but the monster becomes adamant and

threatens his creator (establishing his own GMC).

- Unable to fit into society the monster wants a companion, one like him (goal).
• He promises his creator to leave all in peace if he is granted this request (motivation).
• He is denied (conflict).

Details often grow out of story ideas as you get to know your characters better and start to think as they would. Events escalate, the monster will not be ignored and lives are at stake. The scientist has to resolve the problem. It is his creation; therefore, he is responsible for the monster. How will he appease the monster? Can he appease it? Refusal means the death of his family.

Ultimately, the monster leaves for the arctic circle, leaving the scientist broken. A lesson learned about playing God. This is taken from her book:

"I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world."

FRANKENSTEIN was meant to be a short story, but the ideas grew and the tale grew longer.

Outline your thoughts and play with the characters.

- Can the monster die?
• Are there lessons he can teach us?
• Will Frankenstein's intended dump the doctor and take up with the monster? This happened in Mel Brook's YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN with hilarious results!

Outlines are only guides. Getting the main ideas down for beginning, middle and end give a starting place for further ideas. Like a seedling, the ideas will blossom into something, a real story. But keep in mind; you alone are responsible for your own creation.

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Jennifer Childres facilitates a writer's group at Mauney Library in Kings Mountain. A former guardian ad litem, she received accommodation from President George Bush, Sr. She has also worked with the nurturing program, which teaches child abuse prevention techniques. For her, adventures in marriage and raising a teenager keep life fun and lend proof to the adage "Love conquers all."



Picture from Flixter.com

*FROM THE O.C. (Other Chapters) -*

*WHAT IS PLOT?- By Georgia Woods*

This article was first printed in the Jan/Feb issue of the Passionate Ink newsletter. Permission granted for sister RWA chapters to reprint with proper credit given.

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**By Georgia Woods**

As a senior editor for an e-publisher, I see a lot of manuscripts. Some of them I start reading and I'm caught up from the first few lines. Others I am unable to stay interested enough to finish the first chapter. And sometimes both authors started out with equally great ideas, good characters, interesting situations. What makes the difference?

What do you think plot is? The standard definition is that it's whatever happens in a story...but does that mean every scene is part of the plot? Plot is the significant events that build a given story. Notice I said "significant" events... For example, if your character is washing her kitchen windows, that can be a scene, but it's not part of the plot necessarily. But if your character's house is about to be burglarized and the fingerprints which catch the suspect are left on those clean kitchen windows, then washing them could be part of the plot.

In the best books, every single scene moves the plot forward. If you have scenes that don't move the plot, it slows down the momentum. For example, our window washing scene from the prior paragraph would, if not making an important point, possibly end up fodder for the editor's knife. Some people will argue and say well, in print or longer single title works, you can have scenes that are descriptive, part of setting the scene or character or world building. But if you think about it, those things are part of the plot - you can't have a story without a world and characters, so they have a significant place in the plot. However, it is my belief that no matter what type of work it is, every scene should be of concern to you as a writer, and you should make sure each and every scene keeps the reader's attention while it gives information. If you bore the reader with too much information, even information you feel important, they might lose interest and even quit reading.

Think of it this way...when you go to a party and become involved in the conversations and happenings there, if something occurs in front of you, say a fight or a romance or any significant event, do you, as an observer, need to know what shaving lotion the man is wearing? Do you need to know his parents' names? Do you need to know she bought three dresses before she could decide which one to wear? When we meet people in real life, we take them at

*“Also try to keep the idea in the back of your mind that a reader is always looking for a good place to stop, where they can be satisfied to go to bed or go make dinner or go do laundry or whatever, and you don't want to give them one. You want them to be so embroiled in the action of your story, so hooked into what is happening to your characters, that they don't dare stop.”*

face value, and we can come to care about them without knowing everything about them. You should give just enough to build a character sketch, but not their life's history, enough to hook the reader into caring about them or what happens to them, but you want to keep the action moving and the reader interested. Action will keep the reader engaged more effectively than anything else. And action can be a dinner out, a fight scene, whatever, but things have to be happening, and the reader should be learning what's going on from those things that are happening, not things they are being told by narrative. And be careful - new writers sometimes use the dinner scene to have a dinner conversation and introduce information they want the reader to have which isn't necessary. The reader isn't interested in learning why a character acts the way they do by hearing them tell their life's story over dinner. They are interested in learning what makes a character tick by how they react when things happen to them. Action, action, action.

Also try to keep the idea in the back of your mind that a reader is always looking for a good place to stop, where they can be satisfied to go to bed or go make dinner or go do laundry or whatever, and you don't want to give them one. You want them to be so embroiled in the action of your story, so hooked into what is happening to your characters, that they don't dare stop.

Now, you can use the dinner table to impart important information. In a book I just finished editing, there's a scene over a dinner table at Denny's, well actually over coffee...and it's terrific. But it's terrific because of the information imparted, not because of the setting. On one side of the table, you have two vampires, male and female lovers, and on the other side of the table are two vampire slayers, male

*FROM THE O.C. (Other Chapters):*

*WHAT IS PLOT? (continued)*

and female. The vampires are trying to convince the vampire slayers to help them rescue someone instead of completing their slayer duties. The conversation, the way the two males glower at each other while the women try to keep the peace, meanwhile a truce is being set up and they almost come to blows several times as the conversation goes back and forth.

It's a great scene for both illustrating out the characters are working out the power hierarchy and showing character traits, so it can be done. It is my opinion and preference as a reader that every scene teach me something about where the story is going and how it's going to get there, and if it doesn't do that, I skim and keep moving until the next scene where I start reading again. I know as authors you find yourselves skimming on occasion, and it's frustrating. Scenes shouldn't be random, they should all have reasons, something to show the reader that is important to the story, either to the internal conflict, or the external one, or to the story arc, the character arc, a logical reason for being in that place at that time. Don't add scenes that encourage your reader to skim.

So, what makes a scene or story worth caring about to your reader? For the reader to care, there has to be something at stake, something of value to be gained or lost. And there should actually be at least two things at stake, an external one, like a bad guy to be defeated, and an internal one, like too much pride to be overcome. And the biggest attribute, I believe, you can use to make your story more interesting is to make sure the matter at stake is extremely important, and the battle to win it isn't fair. If you think about it, when you get something without having to fight for it, you don't value it as much.

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Think back over the lessons you've learned in life and when you've learned the most important lessons. When you do everything right, you don't learn a lot. We learn the most by fighting against very high odds and making lots of mistakes. That's what makes life and a good story interesting. When you make mistakes, you are putting yourself out there knowing you don't know it all and willing to take the chance because something you want is more important and you are willing to go after it even knowing you might fail. That is what makes a story.

Do you ever plot, then have your story take off in another direction? What do you do? Redirect or go with the flow? I think learning to be flexible when you are writing is part of having "living" characters - they learn something that changes their choices, or changes their minds, and you have to allow for that, I think, for the story and character to stay true to life. You can plot all day long, but when you sit down and write the story, something can happen that makes your plot not work, you may find a flaw in the logic, or something the character does that doesn't seem "human", and you have to allow for that. I think if the plot/story is forced into its twists and turns, it feels forced. Things happen and if you try to remain too rigid, you lose the spontaneous emotion and reaction that elicits amazing, and true, things to the writing.

For plotting, I'm a mix of pantster and plotter. I make what I call my outline, but it's basically a list of scenes I've planned to get my characters from here to there, but how the scenes hook together is up in the air and allowed to just happen. I do number them, and I'll do "a. b. c." under them if I have specific points I want to make sure the scene includes. But I allow for my characters to be human, to make mistakes and have to go back and fix them, to inject their personalities and take the story in a bit of a different direction than I'd planned.

So plot your story, then feel free to allow your characters to grow, to learn, to be real, and let them drive the story, not the story drive them. In this way, your story will be real, will read as if it is true and real, and your characters and scenes will come to life in the minds of your readers.

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Georgia Woods is a senior editor and Editor for Author Development at Loose Id.

*FROM THE O.C. (Other Chapters) -*

*AMANDA, THE PYTHON AND THE PET SHOP ROBBER—Paula Graves*

The following article appeared in the February 2010 issue of Magic Moments, the newsletter of Southern Magic, Birmingham, AL, Nannette Conway, editor. It may be reused by RWA chapters with appropriate credit to the author and chapter.

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**By Paula Graves**

My 10-year-old niece has decided to write a play, inspired by a section of her social studies book that used a play to illustrate life in the early days of the American colonies. As I am the resident author in our family, she came to me for advice. She had an idea--she wanted to write about a pet shop. But that was all she knew.

It occurred to me that, sometimes, all that any writer knows about her stories is that it's about a pet shop. Or a cowboy. Or a murder. We've all started with that one little nugget of something--a place, a situation, a character--and had to build the story from there. But how do you explain that process to a 10-year-old?

I started with the obvious. "What happens at the pet shop?"

She thought a moment, and finally said, "A mean girl comes in and opens all the cages, letting the animals out."

I asked her why the mean girl did that. We thought about it, and we finally came up with the idea that she wasn't really mean. She just thought animals shouldn't be in cages. She was an activist, and she opened the cages as a protest. So, now we had our story problem. But we didn't really have our who.

Whom does the story problem most affect? Every story needs a protagonist, right? My niece, Ashlee, decided that the pet shop manager, Amanda, had the most to lose. The activist released the pets on her watch. It was her job to gather them back up.

So we had our who. And by virtue of our story problem, we also had a what--our protagonist's goal. Clearly, Amanda wants to gather the animals and return them to their cages. We even had a tacit "why"--it was her job. But, as I explained to my niece, "it was her job" isn't a compelling motivation for our purposes. Stories need to transcend the mundanity of real life. Motivations need layers. Sure, a sense of responsibility would lead Amanda to round up the animals. But a true consequence of her actions would make the story seem more urgent to the reader.

We decided that the store owner was scheduled to come in to inspect the store that afternoon at four. The store had to be spotless, all the animals accounted for, by the time he arrived. Now our motivation had a strong sense of urgency and a personal consequence for Amanda if she was unable to achieve her goal.

So, we had our who, our what, our why, and Ashlee was ready to get to work. But I explained that we weren't quite there--because the most important element of all was missing.

The why not.

Conflict drives story. No matter how beautiful your prose, you're not really a storyteller until you can come up with believable, sustainable conflict.

I explained to Ashlee that if Amanda gathered up the animals in time to impress the big boss, without anything standing in her way, we wouldn't have much of a story. So something had to happen that threw a wrench in her plans.

Ashlee's first suggestion was that Amanda was able to get all the animals but one--a python. I thought that was a good start, but a more intense complication might be to have TWO animals missing after all the others were rounded up: the python...and an expensive angora rabbit, which just happens to be the python's favorite kind of snack. Now, you had two

*FROM THE O.C. (Other Chapters):*

*AMANDA, THE PYTHON AND THE PET SHOP ROBBER (continued)*

animals out, and one of those animals posed a grave danger to the other. The plot thickens!

But is that really enough conflict to sustain a story? You're still looking at an anecdote, not a story. You need an adversary. Someone or something that poses a true obstacle to the protagonist achieving her goal.

Because even if the python is hungry, and the rabbit is vulnerable, you're still looking at a situation that's part of Amanda's goal, not a true conflict.

There needs to be a reason why she might not be able to catch the python and rabbit on time. Something that stands in her way.

"Something like a robbery!" my niece piped up. A child after my own heart.

A robbery was a great idea. As the pet shop people are frantically trying to catch the python before he catches the rabbit, in comes a robber, holding up the store. The longer he holds them at gun point, the harder it is to reach their goal. We finally have a true conflict.

So we had our story basics: Who, what, why, why not. We had a complication--the python and rabbit sideshow--and we had a ticking clock.

But did we have a story?

Not completely. Story also involves characters-- who they are, where they've been, what they know, what they don't know. Story includes exposition, dialogue, action, reaction. My niece and I talked about ways we could use the complication to help resolve the conflict--perhaps upon learning the store employees can't access the safe, the robber spots the runaway rabbit and demands to take him as payment. And the second he grabs the rabbit, the python, which was lurking in the ceiling tiles, drops down on the robber in an attempt to grab the rabbit. The python ties up the robber, saving the day. And the rabbit gets away

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with his life, quickly caught by one of the employees and returned to his cage. The employees get the store cleaned up in time for the big boss to arrive, and Amanda gets her promotion and her raise.

Yay for happy endings!

I have no idea if my niece will ever get around to writing her play. But I think she has a little clearer idea of the elements that go into telling a story effectively. I have to admit, I learned a little something myself by breaking story structure down to its most basic elements in a way even a 10-year-old--or a multi-published author--could see how everything fits together.

Maybe the next time you're sitting at the computer, with just one little speck of an idea rattling around in your brain, you'll think of Amanda, the python and the pet shop robber, and it'll be a little bit easier to turn that snippet of an idea into a story.

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Paula Graves writes edgy romantic suspense for Harlequin Intrigue, including her current Intrigue miniseries, Cooper Justice. Visit her blog: <http://spinstersandlunatics.blogspot.com> or her website: <http://www.paulagraves.com>.

# CHARACTER PROFILES...The Chief

## We All Need a Hero

By Sandra Lee Robinson

We all need a hero, or so the song goes. Let's examine the one we most often reach for - The Chief. You know him on sight. He's Captain Kirk from Star Trek, King Arthur or even Henry Higgins from My Fair Lady. He's the CEO who made a fortune before he was 21. He's in charge of everything and expects you to know it.

According to THE COMPLETE WRITER'S GUIDE TO HEROES AND HEROINES, the Chief is Goal Oriented, Decisive and Responsible. An Eye-on-the-prize kind of guy, he'll get the job done. "Do something or get out of the way" is his motto. Challenges just spur him on.

On the downside, he's Stubborn, Unsympathetic and Dominating. He'll fight to the end to get things done right, but he doesn't understand excuses. If necessary, he'll bully people into his corner.

Emotionally, the Chief appears harsh and unfeeling but this belies a protective nature. What's his, he keeps and protects. Relying on others is something he never thinks about, his independence too important to risk that.

1. Goal Oriented , the Chief plows through any project, reaching for what's most important and ignoring the rest.
2. Mr. Decisive , the Chief handles any problem - his way.
3. He's Mr. Responsible. He takes on more than his share of the burden just to be certain the job's finished and the prize is won.
4. He's Stubborn. The Chief sometimes works so hard on solving a problem, he's the last one to see when a cause is lost. Obstinate to his last breath, he'll continue to fight.
5. He's Unsympathetic. He doesn't understand why



"Star Trek" Picture from Flixter.com

people need so much help. He's unsentimental and doesn't deal with emotions.

6. He's Dominating. "Mr.- I'm-in-Charge" gets irritated when decisions aren't made right away. He often bullies people in following him - after all, he's going in the right direction.

7. He controls his environment. Even in childhood, the Chief knew what he wanted. All too often, he came from an unhappy background or assumed too much responsibility too soon.

8. He refuses to let anyone else affect him. He's often the class president or only kid in school making money.

9. Explain himself? Never. He'd rather lead than communicate.

10. When he's a Born Leader, he accepts the authority that's been given to him and rules with an iron

fist to protect his family and kingdom. Picture Michael Corleone from Godfather II or the King of Siam from The King and I.

11. Loss of control scares him - again, picture Michael Corleone.
12. The Born Leader has always been aware of his destiny. King Arthur
13. He's also the Conqueror - one who has fought for everything he has and his sense of destiny comes from within himself, not his circumstances. Don Vito Corleone in The Godfather
14. The Conqueror demands respect. He also uses the establishment for his own end
15. The Chief is drawn to careers that let him lead.
16. The Chief can delegate but he's impatient with lesser beings.

For more information, see THE COMPLETE WRITER'S GUIDE TO HEROES AND HEROINES, by Tami Cowden, Caro LaFever and Sue Vidars.

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Sandra Lee Robinson succumbed to the lure of the Superhero long ago, whether he wears the cowl and cape, a military uniform or a black mask, cape and sword. Throw in the cemetery next door and she has no choice but to write paranormal romances.

***HOT OFF THE KEYBOARD — Member News and Milestones***

**Leigh Court**

Completed Novella to submit to Samhain for their "Red Hot Fairy Tales" call for submissions

**Allison Morse**

Recently attended the SDSU Conference. Agent Nephele Tempest from the Knight Agency, Natalie Fisher from Dijkstra Literary Agency, Michelle Wolfson from Wolfson Literary Agency and editor Selena McLemore from Grand Central Publishing ALL requested a partial of her novel "When All the World Was Married"

**Dorrie Lloyd**

Submitted her first romance to Woman's World called "New Horizons."

**Jody Brightman**

Woman'sWorld rejected her sweetest puppy story. And, after a year and several emails, Tor rejected "Timber Falls"

**Suzanne Lazear**

"Innocent Darkness", her YA steampunk fairy-tale, and got 2 rejections and 2 partial requests. "Interfluit", her YA paranormal, got an editor rejection. "Stakes and Corsets", her adult steampunk romance, also got an editor rejection.

**Kaitlin O'Riley**

Just completed her vampire historical novella, entitled "Immortal Dreams" will be released in an anthology called "Yours for Eternity" with Hannah Howell and Alexandra Ivy in September. And her fourth historical novella for Kensington, "Desire in His Eyes", will be released on March 2.

**D.B. Reynolds**

RAPHAEL, the first book of her Vampires in America series, has been nominated for a 2009 PEARL ParaNormal Excellence Award in Romantic Literature, in the Vampire Category. And HEART OF THE WOLF, a werewolf novella, SOLD to Siren-Bookstrand with anticipated July 2010 release.



**Wanna Connect with  
LARA Members Online?**

Check out our Group Page at  
FaceBook:

([Click Here](#)) or search for  
"Friends of LARA"

CONTEST CORNER — Have You Entered?

2010

By Dorrie Lloyd

These contests are taken directly from the RWR. If you know of any upcoming contests you would like LARA members to know about not in the RWR, be sure to email Erica Barton at etnsuz@yahoo.com, and we will get it into the next newsletter. Also, be sure to sign up for the LARALink to be notified of other contests posted monthly by Maria Seager.

\*FMI = "For More Information"

\*\* = Published Authors Only

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APRIL

2010 Touched by Love Contest

Fee: \$25

Deadline: Midnight, April 1, 2010

Details: Sponsor: Faith, Hope, and Love RWA Chapter; first 30 pp. of inspirational ms., 2-page synopsis, electronic entries only; final round judges are published authors.

FMI: www.faithhopelove-rwa.org or email RileyK1@aol.com

Published Beacon\*\*

Fee: \$30

Deadline: Apr. 1, 2010

Details: 3 copies of book published in 2009; judges are readers.

FMI: firstcoastromancewriters.com or beacon-pub@firstcoastromancewriters.com

27th Annual Orange Rose Contest

Fee: \$25 - \$35

Deadline: Apr. 10, 2010

Details: Sponsor Orange County Chapter; 55 pages (including synopsis); first round judges are published authors; final round are acquiring editors of RWA-recognized publishers.

FMI: www.occrwa.org/contest/htm or contact contest coordinator Lynn Nissen at lissenoccrwa@yahoo.com

MAY

2010 Magic Moments

Fee: ? - Not stated

Deadline: May 1, 2010

Details: Sponsor Heart and Scroll, First 10 pages or 10-page scene of hero and heroine meeting, i.e., that "magic moment"; judges are experienced, published, and unpublished; final judge is Miriam Krise, Irene Goodman Agency.

FMI: contest page on www.heartandscroll.com

TARA

Fee: \$25 (PayPal accepted)

Deadline: May 1, 2010

Details: Sponsor: Tampa Area Romance Authors; electronic entries only; first chapter with 4,000-word maximum (actual word count and that includes prologue if applicable), optional synopsis up to 1,500 words; judges trained, experienced, published, and final judges are editors.

FMI: To obtain entry form and rules, send SASE to Anne-Marie Carroll, 5022 Umber Way N, Tampa, Fla. 33624 or email TARAContest@gmail.com, amcresume@aol.com or go to www.tararwa.com

3rd Annual Break-Up Contest

Fee: \$30

Deadline: May 1, 2010 receipt

Details: Sponsor: Alaska Romance Writers of America; Up to 10 pp. of manuscript's most passionate argument, break-up, or black moment; 3-page synopsis may be included, but is not judged; judges are AKRWA-trained judges, PROs, and published authors; final judge is Laurie M. Rauch, Samhain executive editor.

FMI: go to www.akrwa.org for questions go contact contest@akrwa.org

IVRWA Bad Kitty

Fee: \$15

Deadline: May 1, 2010

Details: Sponsor Inland Valley RWA in conjunction with Parker Publishing; first 15 pages of stories about tantalizing tabbies or sexy wares with a required 1-page synopsis; judges are editors, published authors; final judges are editorial staff of Fire Opal Romances.

FMI: go to http://inlandvalleyrwa.wordpress.com

Romancing the Script

Fee: \$25

Deadline: May 1, 2010

Details: Sponsor: Scriptscene RWA; First act, which is not to exceed 30 pp. electronic entries only in PDF or RTF standard industry format of first act, which is not to exceed 30 pp.

Note: If entry is chosen as one of the three finalists, full, completed ms. Must be submitted; judges: industry professionals; final judge is produced screenwriter.

FMI: www.scriptscene.org or contact Leslie Ann Sartor at rts.contest@gmail.com



## What's New at LARA

### LARA Has Just Launched It's First Water Cooler Chat Room

That's right...

Now another perk of being a member is the ability to chat with other LARA Members at random times.

Go here to see the new site:

<http://lararwa.com/members/chat.html>

### LARA Has An Online Word Count Club

At the Online Word Count Club, you can sign up for one of two challenges. You can either:

- Challenge yourself to write 100,000 words in 2010—the equivalent of a 400 page romance novel—and get special recognition at the end of the year...
- OR, shoot for the 1K a Day Challenge and shoot for a goal of 300K (with 65 days as a break).

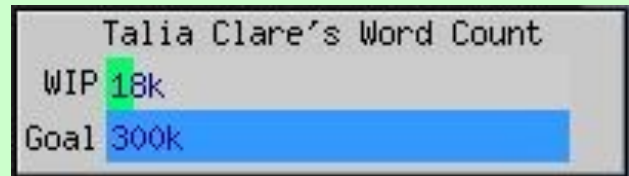
Join by adding your name and word count in the comments section at:

[www.larawcc.com](http://www.larawcc.com)



### Progress Meters

We are happy to announce that LARA now has Progress Meters linked to the LARA Member Site.



That means, anyone who wishes to share their Manuscript Progress throughout the year can now do so with the whole chapter (*and it stays with the chapter—aka, it remains private*).

To add your progress meter:

- Go to [www.StoryToolz.com](http://www.StoryToolz.com) and sign up for their free account.
- Get your HTML and send it to Aileen Fish at [aileen@aileenfish.com](mailto:aileen@aileenfish.com).
- If you want to be part of the Online Word Count Club, also send the HTML to Erica at [etnsuz@yahoo.com](mailto:etnsuz@yahoo.com).

Then, when you update your progress meter at StoryToolz, it will update wherever your HTML is posted. Check out the New Progress Meter

Page at:

<http://lararwa.com/members/wordcount.html>

## THE PAGE REVISION CLUB...

Okay, so you've written a Novel. Ready to do the real work? If you revised 25 pages or more this month, your name should be here. Email Erica at [etnsuz@yahoo.com](mailto:etnsuz@yahoo.com) to become a Page Revision Club Member.

Veronica Blade	321 Pages
Lynne Marshall	164 Pages
Erica Barton	126 Pages
Arlene Tellez	100 Pages
Maggie Marr	82 Pages
Robert Hecker	50 Pages
Robena Schaerf	45 Pages
Rae Shapiro	25 Pages
Dorothy Howell	10 Pages



## Submissive Superstars

Sometimes the hardest part about being a writer is the rejection part. This one little thing can scare a writer off of submitting altogether.

So, in the spirit of nailing your fears to the wall, we are putting forth a new challenge...

### **The Submissive Superstar Challenge.**

Anyone who submits their manuscripts to 25 agents, editors and contests will get a special prize (to be named at a later date). Use the last page of this newsletter to track your submissions, then bring it to a meeting or email it to Erica at [etnsuz@yahoo.com](mailto:etnsuz@yahoo.com) when you have completed the challenge.

