

Words of Paradise

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In this issue:

- *President's Place: "What Should I Read?"* - **Lynn Raye Harris** page 1
- *Aloha Chapter News* page 3
- *"A Feline Muse, Part 5: Spoiled Beasts"* - **Morag Pippin** page 6
- *Poet's Corner: "Why Does a Woman Need a Man?"* - **Leslee Ellenson** page 8
- *Take Five: "Debbie in Wonderland: Playing the Name Game"* - **Michael Little** page 8

President's Place

What Should I Read?

by Lynn Raye Harris

Writers write. Writers also read. In fact, you can't really be a writer and not like to read. Most writers typically were voracious readers at some point in their lives. Usually, you know what you like to read, and many times you end up trying to write a story just like that. Indeed, one of the questions asked of the *Strong Currents 2* authors who read their stories at the Kapolei Library on July 19, 2006, was "What makes you want to write books?"



My reply was pretty much the standard answer I've heard other writers give: *I started writing because I couldn't find the story I wanted to read in the bookstore. If I wanted to read it, I had to write it.* I didn't say it because it was an answer I'd heard before, but because it really was true for me. I wrote what I wanted to read. (Apparently I was the only one who wanted to read that story because it never sold. Ahem.)

Probably, you have no trouble figuring out what you want to read. But just in case you do, someone has helpfully written a book called *1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die*. How could I resist perusing that list, especially when I found it online? You probably won't be surprised when I tell you that romance novels aren't represented (unless you count Jane Austen, of course).

The entries are selected by critics, reviewers, and other literary persona who claim to be in the know. They also claim to have chosen across a wide spectrum and to have attempted to be genre-blind (to an extent). Elmore Leonard made it with *Get Shorty*, fortunately, so I guess they tried. (I agree with that choice.)

Any book of this nature is inherently exclusive. I'm not really complaining about the lack of romance, which is to be expected, but there's no nonfiction

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Romance Writers of America

www.rwaaloha.org



President: Lynn Harris

Vice President: Leslee Ellenson

Treasurer: Sally Sorenson

Secretary: Melissa Dylan

Publications: Michael Little

either. No biographies or diaries, no memoirs. No classic works such as Herodotus's History or Freud's lectures or Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. No Bible.

I did the math. If you can read a book a week, it'll still take you 20 years to read the books on this list. What about all the other must-reads that will have surely arrived between now and then? And what about those other works I mentioned?

While a book like this one is fascinating, and probably deserves a place in the serious bibliophile's library for the reference material alone, I think the concept is a bit flawed. Romance writers/readers typically take the most flack for having "unsophisticated" tastes, for liking trash and sex and not knowing a good book even if it plopped on their heads like Newton's infamous apple.

I disagree, naturally, or I wouldn't be writing this column. I think you should read widely across genres and you should read what interests you. You should even reread your favorites from time to time. Classics, romance, mystery—whatever thrills you and makes you excited to be a writer. Because that's what will make your story exciting. The more knowledge you have, the more you bring to the table of your experience.

In the interest of sharing our tastes, I'd like to solicit your input. How about a book review or two in each newsletter? Not the sort of review where you read a book and tell us what you did and didn't like about it, but a review *only* about books you're excited about (this eliminates the pressure to read the latest releases or to be nothing but nice when reviewing peers). Any genre, any subject. We're writers, and writers learn by reading and doing.

I'll kick things off with a short list of my own, which is by no means inclusive of every book I love. But I have to start somewhere. I'm not including detailed plot synopses since you can look those up on Amazon.com. But you can write your reviews any way you want, of course.

Lynn's Must-Reads (a work in progress):

***The Prince of Midnight*, by Laura Kinsale**

This is a historical romance novel. It's been reissued, but the most famous version features on the cover a bare-chested Fabio riding a horse. This book is simply wonderful. The heroine is unsentimental and out for vengeance and the hero is a has-been highwayman. When the heroine comes to solicit the hero's help, she has no idea she'll find a man who can no longer ride a horse or even stand up for long without getting dizzy. The book has its flaws in places, but the story is so incredible that I love this book in spite of the minor things that irritate me.

***Carpe Demon*, by Julie Kenner**

This book came out last summer. It's a paranormal mom-lit about a demon-hunting soccer mom. The book is fast and fabulous. You won't be able to put it down. A demon hunter is forced out of retirement when a nasty demon crashes through her kitchen and tries to kill her. Did I mention that her husband doesn't know about her past? Or that she has a teenage daughter and a toddler and has to not only protect them and hide her past profession, but she's also in the midst of cooking an important dinner for her politically ambitious husband when the demon shows up? Whew. To say life gets interesting is an understatement. A fun book.

***Losing Julia*, by Jonathan Hull**

Wow, the prose in this book is astounding. It's told in several different eras, and all through the perspective of one character who survived the trench warfare of WWI. Patrick Delaney is in a nursing home, but thinks back through his life, especially to the friendship he forged with a man in the trenches and to the man's pregnant lover, who he met after the war. Patrick falls in love with Julia, but he's already married. He makes a choice that costs him Julia, and then spends the rest of his life trying to find her again. You'll hate Hull for being a first-time novelist.

***To the Lighthouse*, by Virginia Woolf**

My favorite book of all time. Woolf captures the way minds work with her disjunctive narrative that floats between characters and through a story about a family's relationships. Reading this book is nothing like reading modern genre fiction, so park your expectations to the side and just sample the wonderful prose. The payoff is worth it. You'll also get an idea of what it meant to be a woman in the late Victorian era. The style is difficult, but take your time.

* * *

So what are your recommendations? Send them to our wonderful newsletter editor, Michael Little, and write them in any style you wish. Long, traditionally formatted reviews, or a list with bullet statements. Doesn't matter. Let's just share.

Aloha,

Lynn

Aloha Chapter News

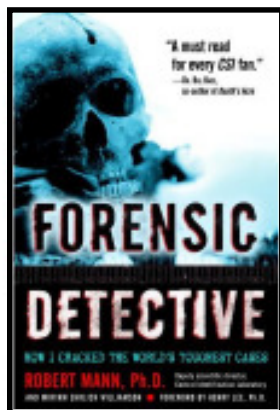


Sally Sorenson Lands New Publisher

Well, it's not exactly "The Call"; more like "The E-mail." In the July meeting I mentioned that my e-publisher had gone under. The good news is that Triskelion Publishing has picked up "All's Faire." I don't have a (re)release date yet, but will keep you posted. I'm very pleased because of the energy Trisk puts into publicizing its authors and titles. Also, it's an RWA recognized publisher, so, for those of you who have attended national conferences, you know this means I've earned my pink ribbon. They also do some POD, which means my book may yet be available between paperback covers. I'm delighted about signing with a new publisher.

Dr. Robert Mann Visits Aloha Chapter August 5

Aloha Chapter welcomes Dr. Robert Mann, author of *Forensic Detective: How I Cracked the World's Toughest Cases*, as guest speaker at the August 5 meeting. Welcome, Dr. Mann!



From [Booklist](#):

Mann, who got his Ph.D. in physical anthropology at age 51, came to forensics after a stint at a funeral home during college eventually led to study at the infamous Body Farm, "a school for the living taught by the dead," where he stands out among the crowd so much that the famed forensic anthropologist Bill Bass takes him on as an assistant.

Mann's career has been filled with colorful and varied cases, ranging from figuring out whether a severed, mummified torso was that of a male or a female to identifying the remains of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer's first victim, a young hitchhiker he picked up and beat to death.

Not all cases get solved, at least not right away—a soldier's remains are discovered, analyzed, and identified 48 years after his disappearance, but a leg that is discovered in a natural pool in Oahu remains unidentified despite several clues. Armchair CSIs will enjoy this fascinating look at forensics in action.

Kristine Huntley

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Latest News from Jennifer Archer

Dear Readers,

There's still time to enter my August contest at www.jenniferarcher.net! One winner will receive an autographed copy of one of the books from my backlist (winner's choice, based on availability of the title). Click on the "contest" link at the left of the page. July's contest winner was Mildred Bromberg.



And while you're at my website, I hope you'll check out my updated News and the cover of my upcoming August release *Off Her Rocker* (Harlequin NeXt). You can also read the prologue and first chapter. The book should be showing up in stores soon — probably the end of this month but no later than the first of August.

Look for it in the Romance section of your local bookstores, and in stores such as Walmart and your favorite grocery chain. I've had a few people tell me they have trouble finding the Harlequin NeXt novels in stores. That's because, while they are mainstream women's fiction rather than traditional Romances, since they are published by Harlequin they are typically shelved in the store's Romance section and often on what is referred to as the "Harlequin rack." If all else fails, ask a clerk where to find the Harlequin novels. Or you can order my novels at www.thenextnovel.com or on Amazon, barnesandnoble.com, and

other online bookstores.

I'm still blogging, too! In case you don't know, a "blog" is an online diary and you can find mine, "Gabfest," at www.jenniferarcher.net at the link that says "Jennifer's Blogging" on the bottom right of your screen. I hope you'll stop by and join in the conversations about books, movies, writing and life in general.

That's it! I hope you are having a wonderful summer and staying as cool as possible!

Happy Reading,
Jennifer

Carol Burnside Does the Snoopy Dance

"OMG! I'd given up hope because it was getting so late in the day, but I got a call from the Maggie coordinator. The manuscript requested by Susan Litman, *A Suitable Wife*, just finaled in the Long Contemporary category of the Maggie." Congratulations, Carol! Carol's *Return To Paradise* won the 2005 Maggie. Visit Carol's website at www.geocities.com/carolburnside2004.

Publishing and Conference News from Jill Landis



My reprint of *Heartbreak Hotel* was released in paperback on July 25th. The book was named Top Ten Romance for Booklist Magazine, Top Five Romance for Library Journal, Book Buyers Best Orange County Chapter, and was a finalist for the Rita Single Title Contemporary division (the book that keeps on giving!).

Went to conference and had a great time. Must report to all that I heard the following (even from my agent). Editors are still seeking paranormal (vampire and werewolf), erotica, and some romantic suspense. Chick lit doesn't seem to be as hot. Historical fiction centered around an actual historical figure (as in the Phillipa Gregory books)

seems to be on the upswing. Inspirational is building fast. Print runs for mass market are down.

That's all from your cub reporter who is in California and can't wait to get home to Kauai.

Alooooha,
Jill

Readings at Kapolei Library

On July 12 and 19, at the Kapolei Library, Aloha Chapter members read from their stories and poems published in *Strong Currents 2*. Featured readers were Wanda Adams, Malena Brooks, Lynde Lakes, Sally Sorenson, Leslee Ellenson, Kate Godwin, Lynn Harris, and Michael Little.



Kate Godwin



Lynn Harris



Michael Little



Leslee Ellenson

Officers for 2007: Just Say Yes!

August is the perfect time to start planning for next year. What have you liked about RWA thus far, and what would you change if you could? Now's your chance to get more involved. Like every volunteer organization, Aloha Chapter exists because people are willing to pitch in and do the tasks necessary to make it happen.

Luckily, none of the jobs is very demanding. It won't strain your pocketbook or cut into your writing time so severely that you won't be able to produce the next great novel. We need a treasurer. We could certainly use a chairperson for publicity to promote our writing, especially *Strong Currents 2* and the third anthology, tentatively titled *Passion in Paradise* and scheduled for publication in 2007, as well as individual authors. A librarian could keep us informed about what's available in our small library of conference self-help material and look for other ideas to aid us along the learning curve toward best sellerdom. The potential of our group is endless.

Volunteer to be an officer or chair a committee by dropping an email to Michael (mlittlehi@gmail.com) or Sally (sssoren@msn.com) today. We will present a slate of officers and chairpersons at the September meeting and throughout that month, vote in October, and do the ceremonial feather-waving amen at our November luncheon.

2006 Aloha Chapter Meeting Dates

Saturday, 10 a.m. to noon
Aina Haina Library

January 7

February 4

March 4

April 8

May 6

June 3

July 8

August 5

September 9

October 7

November 4 (luncheon, Hale Koa)

Part Five (Conclusion): Spoiled Beasts

“Just look at the lazy louts!” Papa exclaimed in disgust as he entered the bedroom. He peeled off his jacket and aimed it at a nearby chair.

“How adorable they are.” Mama smiled as she came to a halt at the end of the bed. She crinkled the paper bag she carried just a bit. No response.

Nutmeg Cat had curled her lithe form into a ball atop her Papa’s pillow. Mephistopheles Cat stretched, smearing his long orangey, white hair on his Papa’s jeans, which had been thrown carelessly at the foot of the bed. Pendragon Cat alone acknowledged his Peoples’ presence. Situated at the opposite end of the bed from his Nemesis Nutmeg, he blinked sleepily and extended a welcoming paw.



“Ha! All these spoiled beasts do is eat, sleep, and sh—”

“Meeow!” Nutmeg loudly interrupted her Papa as she abandoned her pillow and dashed toward Mama. Her sensitive nose had been the first to discover the contents of the paper sack. She nosed it violently, crying “Catnip! Catnip! Oh please give to me now Mama!”

Mephistopheles, now excited by the glorious scent, was demanding his share and pushing his sister out of the way. Pendragon wandered over for whiff but failed to find what the fuss was about. The palm size pillows Mama drew out smelled no more interesting than grass. Now grass was not to be neglected by any means. After all, grass was the very essence of the great, wondrous outdoors. It harbored all the Cat news one could possibly desire. Occasionally, one was even driven to eating it. But it certainly didn’t merit all the agitation that these silly mongrels were exhibiting. He watched as Mephistopheles Cat roughly buried his nose in his prize, fell over on his side still clutching it, then let loose of it only to lie on top of it, staring off into space with decidedly glassy eyes.

Nutmeg pounced on her cushion, rubbing her face it and drooling all over it. She hooked her claws in and rolled until she fell right off the bed to the floor. The ridiculous creature didn’t even seem to notice, for she lay on the Persian rug with her mouth wide open and head swaying to and fro.

“MEEOOWW! MEEOOWW!” Pendragon Cat howled his pleasure at this ludicrous scene.

“Ha! Ha! Breeding will tell! What absurd Mongrels—”

Pendragon’s diatribe was cut short by salmon and tuna treats thrust under his nose. Now this was an event worthy of animation! Pendragon Cat inhaled his delights with aplomb. As he was licking his whiskers in gratification he was annoyed by a bit of fluff toying with his ears. He raised his cobalt gaze to find his tormentor was a colorful bouquet of bright feathers attached to a stick held by Papa. The skirmish was on! He batted, he rolled, he fainted, he wrestled, he bullied, and finally just to show who was really in charge took it between his teeth, shook it ferociously, spit it out and strutted from the room in triumph. An especially magnificent exit considering he was also leaving in his wake two Cats of dubious lineage and wit, unconscious and drooling all over themselves.

Sometime later Mephistopheles awoke from his splendid stupor. He unsteadily gained his feet to go forth and find his People. He was needing the security of a lap. Ahh, perfect. He found Mama and Papa at the table enjoying an evening snack. He landed heavily on Mama.

“Mepher! Get down at once!” Papa was rather choosy in his dining companions: He demanded table manners and in his opinion Cats had none.

Mephistopheles continued to stare at Mama adoringly, if a bit blearily. He touched his cold, wet nose to hers.

“Pay no attention to Papa sweetie-pie. In fact you have my permission to bite him when you are feeling a bit more energetic.” Mama glanced up at Papa. “Leave him be, he’s just experiencing a catnip hangover.”

“You’re just encouraging him to beg at the table.” Papa gathered his used place setting to dispose of in the kitchen.

“He needs no encouragement.” Mama fed King Cat a morsel of roast chicken from her plate. “Do you, darling bunny cat?”

It was indeed a measure of Mephistopheles Cat’s sedate state that he took no offense to this indignity. He savored his treat and snuggled himself deeper in Mama’s lap to continue his nap. He was quite oblivious to the fact that Mama was now done and ready to move into the living room with Papa. Mama lovingly gathered her kitty and took him to his papa for deposit before cleaning the remnants of their light meal.

Slowly rising through layers of slumber, Nutmeg blinked her eyes. It was time to let Mama and Papa know how much she truly appreciated the special treat in which she had just indulged. Perhaps they might bring it home more often! Pendragon Cat was too much of a simpleton to be aware of what he was missing! She could almost feel sorry for his inability to capture the euphoria, the rapture, the bliss that was catnip! It did leave one a bit fatigued, however. Her wobbly gait took her to the kitchen where Mama was giving bedtime treats. Goodness, she had been in dreamland a good long while!

“You shouldn’t give them so many, it can’t be good for them.” Papa had turned off the TV and was straightening the coffee table.

“But the sweet babies love them! Of course they should have lots,” replied Mama giving out crab Pounces by the handful. “That’s all darlings, they’re all gone now.”

“You don’t say that when I’m eating ice cream,” Papa said sulkily.

“Well you’re not a precious little fur rascal are you?” Mama turned out the lights and followed Papa to the bedroom.

“Meeow,” replied Papa hopefully.

“Then you won’t mind sharing their kitty boxes instead of using the toilet before retiring. And dinner will be so much easier. All I will have to do is open a can of kitty stew for you,” quipped Mama as she donned her nightgown.

“Very funny.” Papa made himself comfortable in bed, adjusting blankets and plumping pillows. “Come to bed.”

“The cats are waiting for their nightcap,” Mama said over her shoulder as she headed toward the master bathroom.

Mephistopheles and Nutmeg were waiting faithfully in the bathtub for their post treat sip of water. After all, why would one drink from a bowl when Mama poured fresh from the faucet? King Cat drank greedily from the running stream of water while his sister licked drops from the side of the tub. Mmm, delicious! Mama didn’t turn off the water until Mephistopheles Cat leaped to the floor. He knew he must dry himself before he took up his kingly position at the end of the bed.

Nutmeg Cat stayed to lap up every last drop. Perhaps she would even spend the night here. When the Siamese Tyrant came hunting thinking to trounce her she would laugh at his efforts to find her from the safety of a secret hide-out.

At last Mama slipped between the sheets. “I trust the little good-for-nothings have been taken care of because you have more important things to do,” whispered Papa as he purposefully drew Mama to him.

“MEEEOOWW! MEEEOOWW! Mama you can’t have forgotten Me?!”

“Oh dear, I’ve forgotten lay a bit of fresh litter for the Dragon. He does insist upon it at bedtime you know,” Mama sighed as she climbed down from the bed. “Otherwise he’ll ask for it all night.”

“So ignore him.” Papa flung himself back on his pillow in exasperation. “Just who is more important here anyway—those opportunistic fur weasels or me, your hardworking, loving husband?”

“Well,” Mama replied reasonably on her way to the cat boxes. “Those ‘opportunistic fur weasels’ vie to be the first to warm my icy feet and actually enjoy my morning breath kisses!”

“Hmph, they’re welcome to them,” Papa grumbled.

Mephistopheles Cat felt this complaint against the Queen required reprimand. He did this by vaulting on the bed and selecting a spot where Mama could be snuggled and Papa ignored.

“I suppose you want the bed divided into thirds too, you flea bag,” commented Papa before he huffily turned his back.

It was really just as well Papa understood his position, reflected Mephistopheles Cat as he sprawled, taking at least as much room as Papa mentioned. After all, there could hardly be two Kings in this domain!

THE END

Poet's Corner

Why Does a Woman Need a Man?

by Leslee Ellenson

Why does a woman need a man?
Why obsess about him every day?
A man does as he wants, because he can.
Why can't it all just be come-what-may?

Why obsess about him every day?
Why endure the pain of parting?
Why can't it all just be come-what-may?
A wise woman would stop love from starting.

Why endure the pain of parting?
Why open wide to love and pain?
A wise woman would stop love from starting.
To suffer such love is just insane.

Why open wide to love and pain?
A man does as he wants, because he can.
To suffer such love is just insane.
Why does a woman need a man?

Take Five

**Debbie in Wonderland:
Playing the Name Game**

by Michael Little

Thank you for playing our game. Say what? Well, no, you actually have been playing our game. If you write fiction, or plays, you must play the name game. Name your characters, name yourself even. You do have a pen name, don't you? Not even a secret one? Mine is Cuba Libre. Oops, not so secret anymore.



I know that some writers agonize over naming their characters. It's right up there with having to write a synopsis or outline. But I love the name game. It's an important exercise, not to be taken too lightly, but it's still a game.

Just think, you're in great company. Shakespeare had to name all those characters. He didn't give us Romeo and Debbie. Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's nom de plume) didn't give us Debbie in Wonderland. Just for the record, I have absolutely nothing against the name Debbie. In fact, I just named my latest character Debbie, a woman who is admirable in every way, including being the patron saint of recycling in my current short story.

So here I am playing the name game again, for characters who will live for only a few pages, barring their reappearance in other stories. In addition to the estimable Debbie, there's also a Rick and a Noel and a Brad and a Jennifer (not *that* Brad and not *that* Jennifer, although I do often find names, and crises, on the magazine covers in the checkout line). There's another character who keeps popping up in the story and who may eventually need a name. For now I call him Surfer Dude, as do the other characters.



Lewis Carroll

Part of the fun in playing the name game derives from using names of those we know (in "real life"). Lewis Carroll, of course, named his immortal Alice after a young friend who was his favorite. My Noel character shares her name with a friend of mine who spells her name Noelle. Noel and Noelle are both bright, cheerful, and confident. Rick, on the other hand, is the name of the Bogart character in *Casablanca*, so I've always liked the name. Rick is married to Debbie and they are both from Southern California. They have All-American names. Don't tell me they are not ethnic; they're Southern Californians! Brad and Jennifer, in my story, have just split up, as art once again imitates the magazines in the checkout line.

Have you ever used your own name for a character? I try to avoid it, and I don't see it much, if at all, in other writers. I'll leave it to you, and the psychologists, to analyze that one. I only know that I run from the subject. I think of myself as Michael, but I once named a minor character Mike, who was the distant boyfriend of an Annie, who worked in a gallery in Seattle. In this unfinished novel I placed Mike in Alaska, in the '70s, working on the pipeline, and planned to either kill him off or, more likely, have him run off with another woman. He's not me, but I did put a lot of myself into the protagonist Daniel in that story. I believe that's a common practice for writers.

Some names, as soon as they occur to us, are just right and we know it. In "Speedy Delivery," the romantic local mailman is Russell. The blonde heroine of my novel *Queen of the Rodeo* was, before I wrote a sentence of it, named Donna. The original Donna was a former girlfriend in Seattle who was (a) blonde, (b) romantic, and (c) heroic, although she never claimed to be a rodeo queen. In "Keeping an Eye on Lucy," the title character is an expensive doll who resides in the adult section of a video store. The name Lucy alludes to a similar character in the film *Clockwork Orange*. My doll character had to be a Lucy.

We all enjoy overhearing bits of conversation from strangers as well as friends, as we shop for names and story ideas. I always read nametags, especially those of waitresses. I stole the name Danette from a waitress at Big Island Steak House and gave it to a small town Texas girl in *Queen of the Rodeo*. I also get a kick out of naming waitresses after friends, including Jackie and Carlotta in "How Jackie Got Her Oil Changed."

Sometimes a nickname works better than a given name, which I learned while writing a short story called "Mushroom Girl." Here's the opening of that story:

Mushroom Girl used to have a real name. Her friends stopped using it, however, after the traumatic mushroom incident, and the rumble with Tomato Girl, and the timely meeting with a handsome carnivore.

We never do learn Mushroom Girl's real name. The handsome carnivore turned out to be T-Bone Man, of course. This story was inspired by a friend's experience as a vegetable. My friend is named Meredith, but I call her Mushroom Girl, and in my mind I always see her wearing the mushroom costume.

Thank you, Mushroom Girl, and Danette, and Lucy, and Donna, and Jackie, and Carlotta, and Russell, and Noelle, and Brad, and Jennifer, and Surfer Dude, and Rick, and Debbie. Thank you for playing our game.

Michael

