

Behind The Scenes

THE THRIVING BUSINESS OF EROTIC ROMANCE NOVELS

By Kathleen Davies

If reality TV or the new fall shows aren't packing enough punch this season, perhaps it's time to look for pleasure in a book. Publishing is alive and well and reinventing itself. On board are readers who may not have opened a book in years.

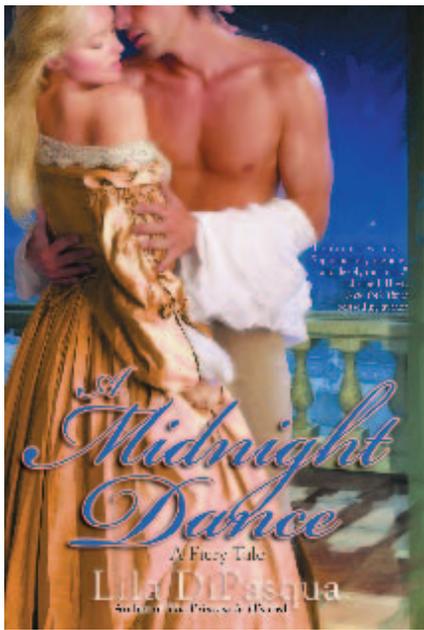
NEW STAR

The e-book is the new publishing star. From Amazon's Kindle to Chapters/Indigo's Kobo, the e-book business is booming. According to the Association of American Publishers, net unit sales of e-books increased 1039.6% in the three-year period to 2010. Conventional publishing isn't all gloom and doom
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Lila DiPasqua, Toronto author of three historical romances for Penguin/Berkley and Berkley/Sensation.





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either, with net sales revenue in 2010 rising to \$28.94 Billion, a 5.6% increase over 2008.

“Adult fiction e-books account for 13.5% of the net revenue market share,” says AAP. Although many long-time print readers profess to be Luddites who prefer actual paper books, the numbers tell a different story. Canadian-Business.com reports that Amazon has sold 105 e-books for every 100 books since April and in July e-books outstripped hard covers.

One genre seeing an explosion in growth, likely thanks to e-books, is the erotic novel. Books we might have taken home in the equivalent of a brown paper bag are selling like lipstick. Companies such as Ellora’s Cave, which specializes in Romantica™ and Exotika™, have a variety of titles for all preferences. *NAL*, *Harlequin*, *Penguin* and most of the other majors publish sexy novels in various imprints.

BIG BUCKS

In fact, romance in general still brings in the big bucks. Romance Writers of America, the profes-

sional organization for romance writers in Canada and the US, reports 2009 sales hit \$1.36 billion, with romantic fiction taking the largest share of the consumer market at 13.2 %, ahead of mystery and science fiction/fantasy.

STRONG & EMOTIONAL

These days romances are about strong, sassy women who face life on their own terms, and there are so many variations and categories to suit individual likes and dislikes it’s hard to keep track. “But the unifying theme in romance is always the developing relationship or the love story,” says USA Today bestseller Kate Bridges, an award-winning author who calls the GTA home and has 19 books published. She is hard at work on her next release. “I write historical romances that take place in Canada and the US, whereas others write Regencies set in England, vampire romances, dark paranormal, or romantic comedies, to name a few. But at the heart of all romance, whether you’re writing a love scene or a battle scene, is the emotion between the characters. Emotion is key to any type of fiction. It can be subtle or tense, but emotion is how we connect to the characters and their dilemmas. This is true whether you’re writing a novel, an e-short story, or a film script.”

NOT BODICE RIPPERS

This is also true of the steamy side of the romance genre. Writers start with a plot and developing relationships and emotion is at the core of the story. Whether we call these stories wicked, spicy, hot (or whoopee!), sexy books sell. Much erotica may be too hard core for the average reader. However, it has a softer, gentler sister in erotic romance, which is extremely popular.

Lila DiPasqua, the Toronto author of three historical romances for *Penguin/Berkley* and *Berkley/Sensation*, believes that

today’s “women buy what they want to read. I know from my readers and fans that a book with a bit of heat and a great plot that tells a wonderful love story is as popular as ever. The only difference between conventional historical romances and what I like to write is a matter of degree... *I’m slightly hotter!* Lila’s second book in The Fiery Tales Series, *A Princess in his Bed*, was described as “Lushly erotic...and deeply romantic.” The just released *A Midnight Dance* is reviewed as “Wickedly passionate... a sensual treat!” Like most hot romance writers, Lila doesn’t hide behind euphemisms but delivers a solid sexy read to make your toes tingle and your heart go all soft and gooey at the tender romance that goes with the steamy sensuality.

HAPPY EVER AFTER VS HFN

Romances used to mean Happy Ever After and traditional stories, both sweet and spicy, still do. But in some of the sexier (i.e., erotica) reads, you may find a shift to Happy For Now (HFN) endings.

Digital books make it easier to access a far wider range of topics and may change, not only what we read, but how we publish. Some pundits believe the changes will affect how we communicate, on a par with Gutenberg’s invention of the moveable type printing press in the 1430s. This launched the world into print. More and more writers are self-publishing. Instead of waiting for agents and publishers to give the nod, writers are crossing their fingers and cutting out the middle person. This may be influenced by the reports of authors making millions that went viral, some of which were true.

The digital field is wide open... if you have romance in your soul and need a push to get started on that book, check the stats.