

I spent the weekend recently at a comic book convention, on panels with other writers talking about writing. I loved it. Being a writer of paranormal romance, especially of vampire novels, was cool there. I wasn't weird, I was clever. I was getting respect. There was even a creative writing professor in the crowd, trying to figure out how he could jump on our popular fiction gravy train. I glowed with satisfaction. It was a good feeling. Unusual. Because as a long-time romance writer I've learned that it isn't easy to get respect for what I do.

Why do I care if people respect my work? Well, I write vampire comedy. Yep, that's a double whammy. First, the uninitiated seem to think that writing light means taking the easy way out. Oh, please. You think wringing a laugh from anybody is EASY? Ask Jerry Seinfeld that question. Or the guys who manage to make me wipe away happy tears at the "Big Bang Theory". It usually takes a whole table of writers to write a thirty minute sit com. I sit alone in my office and sweat bullets crafting sentences and paragraphs, even chapters, that set up my readers for a laugh. I try to surprise, tickle, titillate and emotionally engage readers while taking them along on a romantic romp. As someone who has written dark drama too, I can tell you that it's way harder to write light and funny.

Then there's the vampire thing. My vamps don't sparkle in the sunlight, don't have teen angst or live in small town Oregon. I wish they did. You'd think with the *Twilight* phenomenon, paranormal romances would get a little respect. No, the haters think we're a little nuts and our readers must be Goth weirdos. I hate to break it to the people who look at me strangely when I admit what I do, but my readers are ordinary people who like to explore extraordinary worlds. They like to escape reality in a good book. I'm lucky they think my stuff qualifies.

Now there should be some ways we can guarantee getting respect. One is to brag about the money we make. I could show you my paychecks. But I won't. I have done well for myself. Others have done better. Some of them make big bucks with 99cent offerings on Amazon. Good

for them. I haven't gone that route. I'm old school. In my day, the way to gain respect was to publish with one of the big publishing houses. I'm lucky enough to do that. There may come a time when I can't get a contract with one of them anymore. If that happens, I'll be on Amazon with my own stuff too.

But that brings up another way we used to get respect. The best seller lists. The New York Times list is still pretty much a sacred cow. You hit it, you've proven yourself. But then there's the USA Today Bestseller List. Have you checked it lately? Now the top fifty are awash in those 99cent and free books from Amazon. Some of them may be excellent. Some of them are dreck. Sorry, you know I call 'em like I see 'em. Which has tarnished hitting that particular list. People are buying on-line based on price. Too bad. They used to say the cream rises to the top. On that particular list, it's quantity, not necessarily quality.

Really the only respect we should be lusting for is self-respect. Do you like what you do? Are you proud of your work? Are you ready to show it to the world? Have you gone over it carefully and made sure it's the best it can be? Maybe you do want to put it up on Amazon yourself. Why not? Is it worth more than 99cents? I can't imagine that the hours, days, weeks and months I spend on one of my books would be worth that little. But then no one could afford the price tag if I gave myself an hourly wage and figured how much my time was really worth.

Write because you love it. Write because you have to. Write because, no matter what anyone says, you're proud of what you do. People will respect you for that.

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