



[Interview with an Editor Series: Cindy Hwang, Berkley](#)

Stamped: January 1st, 2007 | Categories: [Misc](#), [Interviews](#) | [Print This Post](#)

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Cindy Hwang is an executive editor at Berkley Publishing Group. Her first job was as an assistant to the editor-in-chief at Berkley. Ms. Hwang is the editor for some of the best known names in romance today: Christine Feehan, Lori Foster and Emma Holly to name a few. She also edits some of my favorite paranormal authors: Eileen Wilks, Emma Holly, Erin McCarthy, Meljean Brook, and Nalini Singh. What is interesting about Ms. HWang is the diversity in her catalog. She is providing readers with everything from romantic suspense (Pamela Clare) to women's fiction (Barbara Bretton) to steamy paranormal (Emma Holly) to western historical (Maureen McKade).

Ms. Hwang was really the inspiration for the interview with an editor series and I thought it Kismet to post her interview responses first. Thanks so much for participating, Ms. Hwang. We readers appreciate it.

Can you briefly describe what an editor does. I think that readers assume that you get to do what we all dream of doing and that is get paid to read for a living. I suspect that the truth is less romantic.

The truth definitely doesn't compare to what people see in the movies or on TV—it's actually very mundane. Editors spend most of their day either in different meetings, prepping for those meetings, doing any follow-up from the meetings, answering correspondence (written or email), responding to author/agent questions and concerns either in writing or on the phone, tracking down checks, and random miscellaneous office stuff such as filing and organizing. Somewhere in there is editing and reading, but not nearly as large a percentage as most people probably assume—maybe about 25% total (10% editing and 15% reading).

How many romance books do you release each month? (ie. is there a set amount released in month and under what imprints?)

For the most part, romances are published under the Berkley Sensation imprints, both mass market and trade. On average, there are five Sensation mass market romances and two to three Sensation trade romances published each month. They range across all the romance subgenres, from historicals to contemporaries to romantic suspense to romantic comedies to paranormals. In addition, there are certain romance authors who are published outside of the Sensation imprint under the Berkley or Jove imprints. These authors include Nora Roberts, Jayne Ann Krentz, Lynn Kurland, Christine Feehan and others.

Berkley Heat is the imprint that specifically publishes erotic romances and erotic novels, and we usually publish 1 title a month in Heat.

Are there any trends you see growing, expanding or contracting? What do you think is driving these trends?

I think everyone is aware that the biggest trend right now is the tremendous growth of the paranormal romance audience. Honestly, I have no idea if and when it'll be over, but as long as great books continue to be published in this market, reader interest and enthusiasm will continue. I think the world-building in paranormal is taken very seriously, and that really appeals to readers who like to lose themselves in the universe contained in a book (and world-building can be done in other subgenres as well, not just paranormal). I also think the interest in paranormal after years where there was a real paucity of books reflects popular culture at large. Besides Buffy and Angel, there's a lot more current and popular shows that have a paranormal element on TV and in movies as well.

What is the most interesting story of how you came to buy a manuscript?

Something I love about being an editor is finding great original voices, especially in the most unexpected places. One of the things I do for fun is to read fan fiction—it's a bit of a guilty pleasure, in fact. I find it interesting to see what people can come up with when given characters and a world already created by someone else, and to see if they can rise to the challenge of keeping these characters in-character, as it were, and still write an absorbing story that hasn't yet been told but can fit into the established, canonical universe. (As an aside, anyone who wonders why the concept of series/connected romances is so popular should check out some websites devoted to fan fiction—there are literally hundreds of thousands of people out there who love some writer's creation so much that they want to see those adventures continue—even if continued unauthorized by someone else). What really captures my interest, however, isn't just how well you can tell someone else's story—it's that even though you're playing with a world and characters not your own, your individual voice can still shine through. That's what happened to me with two of my authors, Meljean Brook and Jean Johnson. Although the first thing I read of theirs was fan fiction, I was so impressed with their voices and the overall quality of their writing that I immediately wanted to read their original fiction. Meljean Brook made that especially easy for me—she had created a website that housed not only her fan fiction, but the first chapter of an original romance she was writing. Although that first

chapter was rather rough, I could see the potential in it, and more importantly, the voice I loved in her fan fiction was still present in that first chapter. I contacted her through her website, and the result is that that the chapter I read became the basis for DEMON ANGEL, which is coming out in January 2007 as a Sensation mass market original. Jean Johnson's first book, THE SWORD, will be published in February 2007, as a Sensation Trade title.

Both of these ladies happen to be writing paranormal romance, but the truth is I loved their voices so much I'd have been interested in them no matter what subgenre they chose to write.

How much time do you spend actually reading as part of your job?

I read only a little in the office, but a lot of time overall is spent reading—maybe 2-3 hours a day on average.

Do you get to read for pleasure? If so, do you have favorite authors?

Sometimes it's hard to separate reading for pleasure from work, but I still do read for pleasure. I mentioned the fan fiction; I love the Harry Potter books, and I also read comics. Some of my favorite romance authors include Jayne Ann Krentz, Linda Howard, Nora Roberts, Kay Hooper, Penelope Williamson—they're the reason I wanted to become an editor in the first place.

What are you looking for in terms of a romance these days? Any particular themes? periods? subgenres? You have some very unique paranormal authors under your imprint and seem to be picking out the ones that are a bit darker, a bit more unique than what is being offered elsewhere. Why do you think that is?

The truth is, and I know people may find this hard to believe, but the most important thing for me is a writer's voice. What their chosen subgenre is isn't nearly as important to me as their voice. And I don't respond to just one kind of voice—my reading tastes are pretty broad. So although I have a lot of paranormal on my list, that isn't the only thing I'm looking for. It's just that in recent years, for me many of the most interesting and unique voices have chosen to write paranormal romance. And because it's the voice that interests me the most, I give a fair amount of creative freedom for my authors to go where their muse takes them—I really only interfere if I feel they're in danger of falling over the cliff and I pull them back. But I usually let them wander to the edge—if nothing else, to see what it's like to look down.

My list is pretty broad though in terms of what I look for—besides paranormal, I also have straight historicals (including westerns), romantic suspense, romantic comedy, contemporary romance, women's fiction and erotic romance on my list. I even have an inspirational title!

Do you think readers today are more accepting of rule breaking romances (pushing the envelope) or are we still very traditional in our buying habits?

I think some readers are definitely more accepting of envelope-pushing romance, but there are a lot of readers who like the more conventional stories as well. I think the overall romance readership is quite fragmented, with different readers all wanting different things from their romances. The trick is to find the right group of readers for each book—a challenge for all publishers obviously.

We've heard some about the loss of young readership or the inability to gain that young readership. Is that changing? What are you doing to try to attract the younger readers?

I think a reader is a reader, no matter what the age. And they're all equally valued.

Do you have a favorite way of spending time away from books?

I love movies and music. I don't watch as much TV as I used to, but I'm addicted to the Food Network. I definitely like to eat!

What is the worst part of an editor's job?

Getting buried under the mounds of paper on my desk (anyone who's seen my office knows the truth of this). Having a book you love not find its audience.

What is the best part of an editor's job?

Finding new voices, and developing careers. Having a book you love find its audience.

Have you considered writing a book yourself?

Definitely not—both editing and writing are full-time jobs by themselves. Besides, I know my talents are in editing, not writing!

It seems there are two very diametrically opposed growths: erotic romance and inspirational romance. Are those fringe trends or will they become more mainstream?

I would say both are pretty mainstream now—there are definitely romances out there already that have erotic elements or inspirational/religious elements woven in the story (probably not in the same book though!)

While you are probably excited about all of the books that you have in your catalog can you share with the readers a few that we should be anticipating? Any new authors or existing ones that have exciting projects for 2007?

I have a lot of books and writers I'm really excited about in 2007, but I'll try not to name every book I bought and edited ;-). Just to highlight (new authors are indicated):



DEMON ANGEL by Meljean Brook (Jan)-new author. DEMON ANGEL has it all—a compulsively readable story, terrific sexual tension, an epic-scaled plot, and a romance that made me melt.



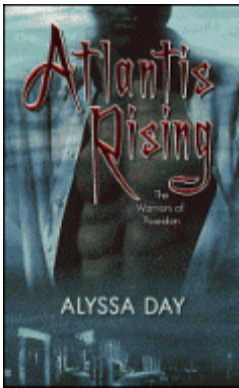
BLOOD LINES by Eileen Wilks (Jan) This is the 3rd book featuring Lily Yu and her werewolf mate Rule Turner, and Eileen has crafted an extraordinary story to fit these two extraordinary characters.



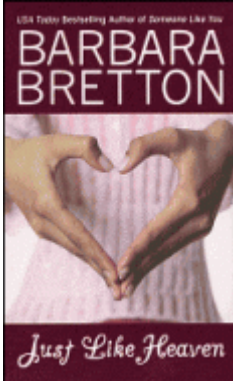
VISIONS OF HEAT by Nalini Singh (Feb) This is the follow-up to SLAVE TO SENSATION, and her hero Vaughn is to die for. Absolutely yummy.



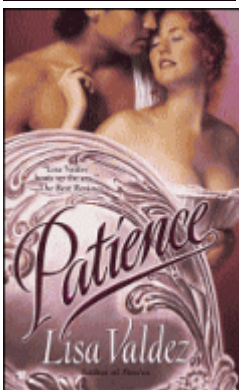
THE SWORD by Jean Johnson (Feb)-new author. This is the first in a fantasy romance series about 8 brothers and an ancient prophecy. Sexy, fabulous and funny—and really wonderful world-building to boot. More importantly, the romance is tender and real and wonderfully crafted.



ATLANTIS RISING by Alyssa Day (March)-first book under this name, and the first in a paranormal romance series featuring the lost continent of Atlantis and some very sexy Warriors of Poseidon. Another author who can combine humor, sensuality and action with fascinating world-building.



JUST LIKE HEAVEN, Barbara Bretton (March) Barbara skillfully straddles the line between contemporary romance and women's fiction—the result is an utterly romantic book featuring an unlikely yet totally convincing romance between two people who would never have even met, except for a twist of fate.



PATIENCE by Lisa Valdez (May) The follow-up to Lisa's first book, the erotic historical romance, **PASSION**. This book has been a long time coming, but it's worth the wait.

A REASON TO BELIEVE by Maureen McKade (Aug) This is the follow-up to

Maureen's superb American historical romance A REASON TO LIVE, and it's just as emotional, touching, and heart-wrenching. For all those historical romance readers who are looking for something a little different, and very special.

THE EDUCATION OF MRS. BRIMLEY (title is tentative), Donna McMeans (Nov)-new author. This was the RWA Golden Heart winner in the Long Historical category, and I devoured the entire manuscript like a box of my favorite chocolates. It's a late Victorian historical romance, and just delightful. *Hmm. Looks delicious. I love Late Victorian settings!*

Thanks so much!