



THE MAGIC *of* PARANORMAL ROMANCE

A perfect blend of
magic and love.

By Kerrie Flanagan



Paranormal romance (PNR) stories take the basic foundation of a typical romance, where the main characters go through trials and challenges until they ultimately have their happily ever after. But PNR adds another level by incorporating supernatural elements and paranormal creatures. So now, instead of a story of boy meets girl (or boy meets boy or any other combination), it becomes a vampire-meets-girl or werewolf-meets-boy story with out-of-this world powers and abilities and sometimes alternate realms.

The driving force behind every romance book is the relationship, regardless of the cast of characters or the rules of the world. The core of any romance story (including PNR) is the emotional connection of the main characters (human or otherwise) and the journey to get to their happily ever after (HEA), or at least a happily for now (HFN). Readers crave that emotional payoff they have anticipated throughout the whole story and expect it. From the beginning, they know the main characters are going to get together, but they want to find out how. Their reward for taking this journey with you is that HEA.

What is paranormal romance?

Before diving into this further, let's look at a few definitions. First, what is the difference between supernatural and paranormal?

In fiction, supernatural refers to things that cannot be understood by science and operate outside the rules of the real world. Angels, demons, and gods are usually classified as supernatural. It also includes claimed abilities embodied in or provided by such beings, including magic, telekinesis, levitation, precognition, and extrasensory perception.

PNR AUTHORS

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Paranormal, on the other hand, means something that exists outside of what we consider normal and beyond the scope of normal scientific understanding. The main things that ground paranormal *fiction* are the subjects and creatures. They include werewolves, vampires, ghosts, aliens, time travelers, shapeshifters, the undead, and more. It's anything out of the ordinary that can't be explained by science and doesn't fit the conventional expectations of nature. Paranormal creatures can have supernatural abilities.

PNR, typically written in a dual point of view, blends elements of urban fantasy and romance. This means, like urban fantasy, it is grounded in the real world, but there are paranormal creatures who have supernatural abilities, and because it's a romance, it is the relationship that drives the story forward. The main characters, whether human or not, are overcoming obstacles to find their happily ever after (HEA) or their happily for now (HFN). The interesting aspect of having paranormal elements is the problems causing conflicts can be different than a regular romance.

The book (and movie) *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer is a good example of this. The main character, Bella (a

human), gets entwined in a world of vampires and werewolves. It is grounded in the real world, but the other characters have supernatural powers. Bella struggles with who she truly loves and must decide if she is going to be with Edward (vampire) or Jacob (werewolf). Plus, there is the added dilemma that Edward is immortal and will live forever, whereas Bella is only human.

Carol Van Natta, author of the paranormal romance series *Ice Age Shifters*, offers advice for meeting the expectations of the PNR community.

"PNR readers enjoy the fun of uncovering the world of magic but like the familiar details in the real world, plus compelling characters and comfort of romance's inherent hope and upbeat ending," Van Natta. "To me, the best PNR stories weave the two elements together so seamlessly that the story would fall apart without both."

That's a sentiment shared by Bernadette Soehner, CEO and founder of 5 Prince Publishing, a publishing house that specializes in romance books.

"The most common mistakes I see when authors write paranormal romance is overdoing one element or the other," Soehner says. "Either the paranormal outshines the romance or vice versa. Sometimes it's hard to keep the elements even and not end up with a paranormal story with romantic elements."

Why PNR?

All fiction stories provide an escape for both reader and writer. Holly Roberds, PNR author of the *Vegas Immortals*, *Five Orders*, and *Demon Knights* series, loves the heightened magic qualities in these worlds. "They give me enough buffer from reality that I can consume a lot of these higher concepts that we all use about politics, about love, about how we handle life, in every aspect, but in a way that feels more fun, more fantastical."

PNR author Aidy Award describes herself as a curvy girl who has a thing for stormtroopers. She's the author of the popular *Curvy Love* series, and she agrees with Roberds. She adds that if she wants reality, she'll watch the news.

ROMANCE PUBLISHERS WHO ACCEPT UNAGENTED MANUSCRIPTS

Here is a list of publishers open to manuscripts from new and unagented authors. Be sure to read the submission guidelines carefully before sending in your work.

5 Prince Publishing:
5princebooks.com

Carina Press:
carinapress.com

Loveswept and Flirt:
randomhousebooks.com/
loveswept-flirt

Spencer Hill Press:
spencerhillpress.com

Boroughs Publishing Group:
boroughspublishinggroup.com

Decadent Publishing:
decadentpublishing.com

Riptide Publishing:
riptidepublishing.com

"In a paranormal romance, I can be transported to a place and time where there's no global pandemic, no bills to pay, and there are hot sexy mates who want me (the reader in the heroine's shoes) to be the one thing they want and need most in the world."

World building

Because PNR is anchored in fantasy, creating a believable world that includes paranormal and supernatural elements is essential to the story. That's why PNR needs to balance fantasy and romance.

When Award develops the worlds for her books, she turns to mythology. "Most people are familiar with Greek mythology, which is why there are so many stories set with that as a basis. I drew upon Sumerian myths for my own world." She says that by using an established system, the basics of the

world are already there for you, and then you can adjust and play with them as fits your story.

Roberds agrees with this idea. She says she used to try to reinvent the wheel when it came to world building, but she doesn't anymore. She takes elements from other books she's enjoyed, then puts her own twist on them so that they fit with her unique story.

When writing fantasy and building unique worlds and magic systems, there is a tendency to want to give too much information in the beginning. Roberds says she is learning not to box herself in. "I don't have to explain every single thing up front. I don't have to have everything figured out," she says. "In fact, I deliberately leave some loose ties to play with later, and it cuts to world building and magic."

Magic systems

With great power comes great responsibility. So even though you can use magic in your stories, keep some things in mind. The first one is that with any magic system, there must be a cost for using it. Does using magic drain your character's energy? Does it have dire consequences? The characters should not have an unlimited supply of magic without some recourse.

Award suggests you check to see if you're adding the magic in order to make it easier for you or your characters. "Because we can basically make up whatever we want, it can be tempting to just give your character a spell to get out of their sticky situation or to solve a plot problem," she says. "But easy isn't always interesting."

Steam or no steam

When it comes to sex scenes in any romance, you have the choice to have these happen on the page or behind closed doors. It is up to you, but it should be an intentional and thought-out decision.

Roberds' books are on the steamy side, but she says there is paranormal at every single spice level, and don't listen if someone tells you otherwise. Write what you are comfortable with. But if



you are looking to write spicier PNR, she suggests giving yourself the freedom to try to experiment to see what's comfortable to you.

"I would emphasize 'experiment' because my book *One Bad Knight* is a lot spicier than my other books, and I don't know if I'm going to do that level again. I'm seeing how it lands with me. Then if I don't like it, I'm not going to keep writing that level of steam," Roberds says.

Award also writes steamy stories: "I do love some good spice in my paranormal romance! I chose to write open-door explicit sex scenes because too many plus-size women are told they don't get to have great sex with hot guys. I purposefully set out to show that we can and do. The choice of what heat level you want to write can either be personal or market-driven (sex sells!). I suggest writing the same as what you like to read."

A well-written sex scene is more than just the physical act. It should not be added in just for the sake of having one.

"A sex scene is just as important as any other scene in the book," Award says. "It should move the story or the heroine/hero's journey along, too. In my books, the sex is integral to the storyline."

"I think there's always some subtextual thing going on," Roberds adds. "A lot of the subtext in those scenes is about the give and take between the characters. It's a conversation in a different way." She also advises writing these scenes from the point of view of the character who has the most at stake in the moment and the most to lose.

Roberds likes to give her characters a special kind of supernatural ability or trait that heightens the sexual experience. "So whether they have a telekinetic touch that affects the other person or just something extra. That's the

cool thing about fantasies. You can just make something up that's real sexy. Besides, who doesn't want a little something extra in the bedroom?"

Indie or traditional?

This is a great time to be an author. You have a variety of options when it comes to publishing your book. You can go the traditional route and find an agent who then works to get you a contract with one of the Big Five publishing houses or their imprints. Mid-size and smaller publishers don't always require an agent, and then you have the option to self-publish. All of these are viable options with their own pros and cons. You need to decide which is best for you.

Roberds decided to self-publish. "I looked at both routes for two years and listened to the people around me and watched what they were doing. I got the impression that [traditional

and self-publishing routes were hard. You just have to figure out which one suits your style more." She realized that she hates writing and sending out queries and also hates playing the waiting game. "I love being in charge of every single element. I love it because if there's something I see that I don't like, I can fix it immediately. I love that power."

If you decide to go the traditional route, do your homework. Soehner suggests you investigate the publisher first: "Always know what they are looking for specifically in a paranormal romance and read what they already have in their catalog. Knowing those specifics will help your chances of having them look at your work."

Also, when it comes to pitching an agent or publisher, study and understand their submission guidelines. If they say only send three chapters, then only send three. If they don't want

attachments, include everything in the body of the email. The guidelines are there for a reason, and if you don't follow them, you risk the agent or publisher not even looking at your submission.

SELF-PUBLISHING RESOURCES

Alliance of Independent Authors:
allianceindependentauthors.org

Kindlepreneur:
kindlepreneur.com

Mark Dawson:
selfpublishingformula.com

The Creative Penn:
thecreativepenn.com

Author Marketing Experts:
amarketingexpert.com

Paranormal romance is a bewitching blend of romance and paranormal elements. It allows you to create new worlds and show a more human side to creatures, like vampires and werewolves, whom many look at as monsters. If you are interested in writing in this genre, read books by authors who are currently successful in PNR, connect with authors and readers via social media, and then dive in and create your world filled with fantasy and romance. 📖

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*Kerrie Flanagan is an author, writing consultant, and freelance writer from Colorado with over 20 years' experience in the industry. She is a frequent contributor to The Writer and the author of WD Guide to Magazine Article Writing along with 19 other books. She moonlights in the world of the sci-fi/fantasy with a coauthor under the pen name C.G. Harris (cgharris.net). Learn more about her at [kerrieflanagan.com](http://kerrieflanagan.com).*