

## *Why I “Still” Write Category Romance Novels*

**By Stephanie Bond**

I get this question a lot from other writers: Now that you’ve broken into single title romance novels, why do you still write category romance novels?

*(For those of you who are new to the romance genre, series romance novels, also called “category” romance novels are books issued by Harlequin and Silhouette (same company) in a specific line such as Intrigue, Desire, SuperRomance, Blaze, etc., and which have defined guidelines for story lines, level of sensuality, and wordcount. You can find a description of all the lines at the Harlequin website by clicking on the “Writing Guidelines” link at the bottom of the home page.)*

The implication of the aforementioned question, of course, is, if I’ve already “made it,” why bother to still write the “little” books? Category romance has long been viewed as the stepchild of the romance genre—a low-paying training ground where your book is lumped in with an avalanche of other category books released the same month. But I so don’t see it that way, and I’m surprised when romance writers are resistant to submitting manuscripts to category lines, especially new lines, where there is much more opportunity for new writers. I’ve gathered a list of some of the arguments against writing for category romance novels, and my responses:

### **I don’t have a “category” voice.**

Some of the longer lines, such as SuperRomance and Intimate Moments, have plot lines (and subplots) that are reminiscent of single title romances. And keep this in mind: lots of category novels written by writers who go on to make a name for themselves are simply reprinted with a single title cover and price, and few readers can tell the difference. If your voice is commercial, it can probably fit into a category romance line.

### **My book will be lost in the shuffle.**

Your book will have a guaranteed print run, a wide distribution, and built-in marketing (at no additional cost to you).

### **The books are only on the shelf for 30 days.**

In North America, yes, but your book will probably be sold into the UK and Australian markets, and translated into foreign language editions for months to come.

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### **I’ve heard that category books don’t make much money.**

Your advances will be low in the beginning (about \$3000, although veteran agented authors will probably get more), but you’ll earn royalties. Some lines earn \$15,000-\$25,000 per title (over a couple of years’ worth of royalty checks reflecting bookclub and foreign sales). Many single title romances won’t earn that much. And if you’re a prolific author, you’ll probably have the opportunity to have more than one release per year—a more difficult feat in the single title arena.

### **Writing for category lines is too restrictive.**

Short, long, suspenseful, inspirational, sweet, sensual, humorous, dramatic, paranormal, fantasy, medical, contemporary, historical, domestic, international, chick lit, women’s fiction, multicultural...what have I missed? Category romance offers unbelievable variety for writers. Yes, you’ll have to stay within the bounds of a particular line regarding wordcount, subject matter and sensuality, but single title romance has those same limitations.

### **Writing for category lines isn’t as prestigious as writing single titles.**

I guess that’s truly in the mind of the writer, and if you feel that way, nothing I say is going to change your mind, but my feelings are that every category romance book I’ve written is in *Books in Print*, and that’s good enough for me. Plus, for every person who’s blown me off because I write those “little” books, there have been three people who were thrilled to meet a person who wrote for the company whose books introduced them to romance novels.

Other reasons I “still” write category romance novels:

- I appreciate and want to keep building on the readership that I’ve garnered in the category market.
- The line I write for (Blaze) is shorter than a single title manuscript, so it allows me to get another project out there with my name on it between my single titles (and it’s a creative treat to write something different).
- Writing category books between my single title releases helps me to better manage my cash flow.
- I love having a book out there for readers at a lower price point than my mass market and trade paperback titles.
- I enjoy working with my Harlequin editor (who bought my very first book), and in this business, that means a lot.

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- Rather than being restricted, I’ve been able to experiment with things in category romance that I couldn’t/didn’t want to do in single title (such as writing in first person point of view).
- It’s an investment in my future—if my career grows, the “little” books with the shelf life of 30 days will be reprinted...as single titles!

If you’re still trying to sell your first book, if your publishing house isn’t buying books as fast as you can write them, or if you’re struggling with a single title career that isn’t delivering what you’d hoped in terms of visibility and revenue, consider writing for the category romance market. ~SBond