

Ashley Ladd's writing blog

Sunday, February 10, 2008

Guest Blogger: Author & Master Promoter Marcia James

Please welcome today's guest author and master promoter, Marcia James. I hope you'll check out her books, her website, and leave plenty of comments for her.

1) You have a very busy promotion schedule this year. Please tell us where your readers can meet you, including Lori Foster's Readers and Authors Get-together in Cincinnati this summer.

I love meeting readers, so I do as many booksignings and conferences as I can. I have two signings scheduled this month (Feb. 16 and 23) at the Pickerington, OH Barnes & Noble; then two signings in April—one at the Pittsburgh Romantic Times (RT) convention (April 19) and one at Chicago's Spring Fling conference (April 26). The RT convention is especially campy and fun, with wall-to-wall costume parties, romance cover hunks, and a signing with hundreds of authors. From June 6-8, authors Dianne Castell and Lori Foster host their annual Readers & Authors Get-together in Cincinnati, OH, which includes lots of games and raffles, along with a booksigning. I never miss it! Then July 30, I'll be one of 400+ authors signing to raise money for literacy at the Romance Writers of America (RWA) national conference in San Francisco. The details for all of these events are on the Schedule page of my Web site: www.MarciaJames.net.



2) You've had a lot of eclectic careers. Please tell us about them.

I have an interdisciplinary Masters in Communications and Creative Writing, and my career has included writing scripts for submarine training videos, ads for shoe stores, and press releases for non-profit organizations. I've freelanced for over twenty years, writing a wide variety of challenging projects—most with a marketing or promotional aspect. I have to admit, though, that penning romances is a lot more fun than writing a How To Install Neon Signs manual!

3) You've got to tell us about Dr. Allegra "Ally" Skye, sex therapist and amateur sleuth's Sex Q&A. Do a lot of people come to Dr. Ally for help?

My latest manuscript, which is currently under consideration at Avon, Berkley, and Dorchester, is the debut book in a comic romantic mystery series featuring a female amateur sleuth/sex therapist. I enjoy writing about Dr. Ally Skye, who has her own sex advice column on my Web site. People email questions to Dr. Skye's Sex Q&A, and friends suggest topics of discussion. The good doctor's answers are meant to be entertaining, but they can also be enlightening! ;-D

4) I also want to hear about your delicious Avocado body paint recipe. How did you come up with that? Have you used it personally and for what occasion?

Lori Foster and her Bookjunkys group came up with the idea for a cookbook of author recipes to raise money to support the U.S. troops. Since I don't cook, I contributed a recipe for Avocado Body Paint to the cookbook, *The Write Ingredients*. (Anyone interested in this cookbook, which features recipes from over 90 authors, can check the Home page of my Web site for more information.) My recipe is basically a yummy one for avocado dip, but it can also be used for some tasty fun. I've tried it, but just like chocolate body paint, this avocado version works best if you use a new shower curtain liner as a drop cloth!

5) Please tell us about your other career of developing marketing and promotional materials. Tell us about your free promotional download that you offer to authors.

In my nonfiction/business writing career, I develop everything from brochures, articles, and slide shows to TV/radio commercials and newspaper ads. Whether the materials are for information, training, or marketing purposes, there is also a persuasive element to them. As a writer, I need to figure out what will keep the reader or audience interested and what will persuade them to do what the client wants them to do—e.g., understand a concept, learn a skill, or buy a product. I've enjoyed applying those persuasive writing skills to author promotion. And in studying the many opportunities for authors to self-promote, I've developed a Microsoft WORD file of PR resources and information. I drop new info into the file as I come across it, and I offer the file free to any author who would like it. Just go to the "Contact Me" page on my Web site and send me an email requesting the file. That brings traffic to my Web site, which is always a good thing.

6) Please tell us about your charitable pursuits, which non-profits you help, and what celebrities you've met through your efforts. What is your pet charity and why?

I love attending non-profit fundraisers, such as silent auctions and casino nights. And when I lived in the Washington, D.C. area, I was involved in organizing a number of charity movie premieres and volunteered to work film events. The side benefit to this was meeting a host of celebrities, including Clint Eastwood, Tom Selleck, Michael York, Paul Newman, and the cast of *Northern Exposure*. I have a virtual photo album on my Web site with shots of some of the celebrities. Now that I live in Ohio, there aren't as many celebrities visiting town, but I enjoy making gift baskets to donate to local fundraisers. As for my "pet" charities, they tend to be animal causes, which isn't surprising since I have a Chinese Crested hairless dog as my author logo. ;-)

7) Please tell us about your honeymoon in Hawaii including your two days of fishing for rainbow trout.

Hmmmm. Just how much detail do you want on my honeymoon? ;-D We had a wonderful trip to Hawaii, spending half the time on Kauai and half on the Big Island. Kauai has a freshwater reservoir that allows guided fishing. We didn't catch a lot of fish, but it was incredibly relaxing just floating on this beautiful lake waiting for nibbles. Unfortunately, thanks to the guide, my husband and I couldn't indulge in any personal nibbles, if you catch my drift. ;-)

8) Why did you ride an elephant in California?

Because he was there? ;-D Actually, when I was a child, I wanted to be a zoologist who trained animals for TV and movies—like Ivan Tors, if you're old enough to remember Flipper, Gentle Ben, and Clarence the Cross-eyed Lion. So when my husband and I visited a CA animal park and had the opportunity to ride an elephant, we did. And last year, we petted a dolphin in Key West. But that's the extent of our up-close-and-personal encounters with exotic animals, unless you count eating at restaurants that serve kangaroo, ostrich, rattlesnake, and alligator.

9) What was it like to be a movie extra? Please tell us about it.

I volunteered to be an extra in *War & Remembrance*, parts of which were shot in Washington, D.C. Since the mini-series was set in the 1940s, we were dressed in period outfits and had our make-up and hair done in 40's styles. Most of the one-day shoot was sitting and waiting to be summoned, and we didn't get to meet any of the mini-series' stars. Not a very glamorous experience. I was in a church scene with a hundred other extras, and the pay for the 8-hour day was \$50.

10) How did you meet David Niven? How did you get the nerve to ask him what he had on under his kilt? (I'm definitely getting to know you better in Cincinnati this summer). J

In the 1980s, I heard that David Niven was going to be a guest on the then-shot-in-D.C. Charlie Rose Show. Being a huge fan of Niven's, I dragged my sister to the show and made her sit with me in the front row. When Rose went into the audience for questions, I jumped up and asked Niven what Scots wore under their kilts. He smiled that gorgeous smile and said, "Nothing." The show went to a commercial, and we exchanged a few more words while Charlie Rose asked my sister for a date! She turned him down, by the way.

11) Do you still rollerblade?

I haven't rollerbladed much since I broke my leg skating down an incline. I decided it was a lot more fun to snow-ski, since landing on soft snow when I fall beats the heck out of hitting asphalt when I crash in my rollerblades.

12) Please tell us about your online workshops for author promotion. Are any coming up and if so, how can we sign up?

Thanks to my PR/Marketing background, I enjoy giving presentations and writing articles on author promotion. I don't have any online workshops until February 2009, when I'll be presenting one that will include lots of "special guest lecturers" in addition to raising money for a deserving charity. (For more information on that, visit <http://winecountryromancewriters.com/workshops.htm>) In 2008, I'll be presenting several in-person workshops—the first at Chicago's Spring Fling conference in April, with co-presenters/authors Jennifer Stevenson and Pat White. Then, at the RWA national conference in July, I'll be co-presenting (with RWA Librarian of the Year John Charles and Jennifer Stevenson) a promotional workshop for attending librarians. I'm waiting to hear back about several other PR workshops I've pitched. I have additional information about these events on my Web site's Schedule page.

13) What is a snail figurine and how did you start collecting them?

Snail figurines are simply decorative items in the shape of a snail, which are made of porcelain, wood, metal or glass, mostly. I've always liked the shape of a snail shell and used to doodle them when I was a kid. So, while my friends were collecting frogs, bears, or unicorns, I collected snails. Since snails are synonymous with "slow", I don't use a snail as my logo, however. And the only snail that appears on my Web site is a caricature of one on the "Contact Me" page.

14) What is your average day like?

I get up around 6 a.m. with my husband, and once he's off to work, I go into my home office and fire up the computer. I handle emails and small jobs until my brain is fully awake. ;-D Then I tackle the more challenging projects, like working on my latest manuscript. In addition to that, I'm writing a PR column for the RWA Kiss of Death chapter newsletter and an author news column for my local RWA chapter, Central Ohio Fiction Writers. I also try to guest-blog at least once a month and post on the blog that's part of the Ohio Romance Authors' MySpace page. (This multi-author MySpace page -- <http://www.myspace.com/romanceauthors> -- is having a great Valentine's contest with more than 20 prizes, so stop by and comment on the blog to enter.) As for the rest of my average day, I try to keep from checking my emails too often, but I'm addicted to them. And I also make a point to get on my treadmill to exercise something besides my typing fingers!

15) Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

One of the things I've learned since I started writing romance is how important the genre is to its readers. More than 50% of all fiction paperbacks sold in the United States are romances, and its intelligent readers are an impressive demographic. Many more women than men read romances, although I think that would change if males knew how many secrets they could learn from romances to answer to their age-old question: "What do women want?" (I often joke with the guys who come to my book signings that romances are instruction manuals for men!) Romances feature empowered heroines and heroic men, and it's very unfortunate that some stigmas still exist concerning the genre. At times of great stress, the sales of romances climb, thanks to the optimism and feel-good nature of the books. And Psychology Today said that women who read romances make love 74% more often than women who don't. There is no downside to reading novels with happily-ever-after endings. And

if romance readers would make an effort to introduce at least one friend to the genre, the romance market would grow exponentially. And that would be a wonderful thing for readers and authors alike.

At Her Command

by Marcia James

DEA agent Domino Petracelli is chasing a career-making promotion and nothing will keep her from getting her man. Okay, so she'd rather infiltrate a Columbian drug cartel than go undercover as a dominatrix at D.C.'s Xecutive Branch sex club. But she's up to the task. As the leather-clad Mistress Bella, Domino investigates the club's drug ring while juggling a surreal roster of kinky submissives—and resisting one sexy client who's not what he seems.

Police detective Dalton Cutter is a man with a mission—avenging his partner, who was murdered investigating the Xecutive Branch. Retracing his partner's steps, he goes undercover as a club client. Dalton's handled killers, junkies, and pimps, but can the Alpha-male cop act submissive long enough to fool Mistress Bella? And will their sexual chemistry, crackling louder than Bella's whip, derail Dalton's investigation?

At Her Command, a comic romantic suspense, pokes fun at the alphabet soup of D.C. law enforcement agencies. When the DEA, the FBI and the DC police unknowingly put operatives undercover at the same club, sexy sparks fly.

Note: Rated R for Risqué

Excerpt: AT HER COMMAND by Marcia James

Detective Dalton "Bull" Cutter sat slumped on the leather couch, drinking his third beer and staring into the eyes of a large Siamese. Chi, the sleek, blue-eyed tom cat, could have been fashioned from marble for all his stillness and unblinking gaze. Despite the open can of cat food Dalton had placed on the kitchen floor, the animal sat on the coffee table directly in front of him as though demanding an explanation.

"Jason's not coming back, big guy."

Dalton's voice sounded rusty so he tried to clear his throat. But there was a lump he just couldn't wash down with the Budweiser. His eyes burned from lack of sleep, and he wished he could find a way to turn off his brain. One thought kept repeating in his head: Jason Walters, his partner and best friend, was dead.

Twenty-four hours had passed since he'd received the call...heard his captain break the news, but the pain was still fresh and razor-sharp.

Dalton resisted tossing his beer bottle against the wall of Jason's living room...his living room, he corrected. Jason had named his partner his beneficiary, a fact Dalton had learned from a lawyer today. The cozy Cape Cod home complete with cat now belonged to him. He'd give a billion Cape Cods for the chance to go back in time.

"It should have been me."

Chi leaned forward as if to make out the muttered words. Instead of continuing the one-sided conversation, Dalton let his head fall back on the couch and his eyes shut. That night two months ago played like a movie behind his closed lids.

"Hey, Dalton, heard about your spanking new assignment." Laughing, Jason walked into Dalton's apartment with a six-pack of beer and two pizza boxes. "Maybe we should change your nickname from 'Bull' to 'Mouse.'"

Several inches shorter than Dalton and leaner, Jason looked more like a college fraternity pledge than a cop. "Very funny. Besides it's not definite yet," Dalton grumbled, unwilling to think about the possible undercover job. Assigned to the Metro Police Department's Special Investigations team, Jason and he worked whenever and



wherever needed. They'd been involved in everything from homicide to vice cases.

Recently the Metro PD had received a tip that underage girls were working at the Xecutive Branch sex club. Dalton had heard through the grapevine his name had been suggested for the undercover role of a club client—a submissive wimp who got off on pain and humiliation.

Damn. Probably retribution for some of the hot-dogging he'd done recently. Maybe he shouldn't have been quite so disrespectful to the police chief when he was being chewed out for wrecking his third unmarked in a month.

Grabbing two beers, Jason put the rest in the fridge. While Dalton watched, his friend made himself at home, getting out bags of chips and placing them on top of the pizza boxes. Balancing the items, he carried them to Dalton's second-hand kitchen table. Unlike Jason's sunny home, there weren't many cheery spots in Dalton's apartment. The breakfast nook with its bay window was the best bet.

"I hear Captain Bennett thinks you're the right man for the job." Jason laughed at his partner's glare.

Dalton cursed fluently. "Yeah, I'm 6'4" and wear a size 46 jacket, but I'm the perfect choice to go undercover as a bondage and discipline junkie?"

Jason snorted. "Haven't you heard? Size doesn't matter. And maybe the captain thinks you need a vacation from always being in charge."

"If it's such a cushy assignment, why don't you volunteer for it?"

"And rob you of the chance to get in touch with your softer side?" Jason dodged Dalton's half-hearted punch.

"Maybe we should draw straws on this one," Dalton suggested.

"No way, José." Jason shook his head emphatically before taking a long swig of his beer.

"Didn't I draw the short straw on that homeless shelter job?" Dalton laid on the guilt as he opened the chips and took a handful. "You think it was fun wearing flea-ridden clothes and sitting in the gutter all day?"

Jason rubbed the thumb and forefinger of his right hand together. Dalton frowned. Years ago, his partner had explained the gesture represented the world's smallest violin playing "My Heart Bleeds For You."

Obviously he was getting nowhere fast with the "who's had the worst assignments" guilt angle.

Dalton changed tactics. "Of course, if you don't feel like you owe me for saving your life at the warehouse in October..."

Jason pointed the neck of his bottle toward his partner. "That was payback for saving your sorry ass in that 7-11 on Penn Avenue last June."

As they fell into their familiar banter, Dalton raised the stakes. "That punk's gun wasn't even loaded. Now if you want to talk life-saving debts, what about that bullet I took for you when you were too busy hustling that working girl to watch your back?"

Jason denied the allegation, and the good-natured argument continued until he finally agreed to draw straws over the Xecutive Branch undercover job. The horrified look on his partner's face when he drew the short straw made Dalton laugh.

"I appreciate your handling this assignment, pal." Dalton laughed and saluted Jason with his beer bottle.

"Investigating the Xecutive Branch isn't like busting some massage parlor." Jason deliberately took the last slice of pepperoni pizza before Dalton could reach for it. "I'm the best damn partner you've ever had, so you better hope nothing goes wrong with this case."

"A bossy woman, black leather, whips,...what could go wrong?" Dalton smirked. "The only thing you might die of is embarrassment."

The only thing you might die of is embarrassment. Dalton's words came back now to haunt him as he tried to breathe under the weight of his regret and guilt. Thanks to him, his partner had convinced their captain to give him Dalton's Xecutive Branch assignment.

Thanks to him, Jason was dead. And the loss was sharper, deeper than anything Dalton had ever experienced.

Thanks Marcia! It sounds like a great book and I also gleaned a lot from your promotion booklet. I hope you had a great book signing in Cincinnati this past weekend.