

Nocturne Bites Tips

Get Conflicted

Barbara: They want complete stories. . .it's hard to concentrate all the important elements of a Nocturne into the shorter page count. Hard, but necessary. They want a beginning, middle and end. They want GMC. They want a fulfilling believable romance and resolution and the sex, while hot, should advance character growth.

Anna: Ann Leslie mentioned emotional conflict a lot. This is key in a Bite. It's hard to torture the characters you love, but it will make for a much more emotional, satisfying story. Think about Karen Whiddon's Bite, "Mate of the Wolf" where the union between the hero's and heroine's races is expressly forbidden. Instant conflict. Or the great internal conflict of Anna Leonard's heroine, Emma, in "Dreamcatcher." Emma has her strength drained away, and exhausted and struggling, must face the enemy (and save the hot hero!)

Barbara: I know when Ann Leslie called me she must have mentioned "emotion" a million times. The story can't be too urban fantasy, too cold or too plot-driven.

Anna: Do you have powerful, emotional moments in your story where you want to laugh or cry or maybe both at the same time? If you don't, you need to find them. There was a moment when I was writing my Bite, "Savage Dragon" where I wanted to cry and I thought "Oooh, I'm onto something."

Barbara: I think, from my conversations with Ann Leslie, and from the guidelines/rejections I've seen, that Bites need to be more character-focused and character-driven. The paranormal elements and the action of the plot should function as a means to highlight the romance and bring the hero and heroine together. I keep thinking of words like concentrated, intense, straight-to-the-heart. In my Bite, "Wilderness", everything that happens—cutting Colin's chains, meeting his pack, rescuing Jacob—all of those actions take a back seat to what's happening inside of Tess. Her journey to empowerment and Colin becoming a part of that journey is what "Wilderness" is all about.

High Concept

Anna: A high concept idea is an original idea that is easy to grasp. This is a balancing act. You want a unique premise, but you can't make it too complicated, especially not in a shorter Bite. If you do have a lot in your paranormal world you've created, maybe just show a subset of it and leave the rest for the next story. I still remember why I downloaded Nancy Holder's Bite, "Son of the Sea" – because to save her sister, the heroine, Nia had to become the hero's lover, conceive his child, and be transformed into a mermaid! Now that is unique.

Barbara: This was not spelled out in any way, but from interviews and podcasts I gather that sometimes people are getting way too complicated and complex and "cerebral"(that's from Tara Gavin) with their paranormal elements. As more and more paranormal gets published, it's easy to go complicated to try to be different. Too complicated takes away from the focus which

should be the romance. If possible, think of a paranormal element that would actually ratchet up the sexual tension and emotional connection. Your paranormal element should contribute to the romance not distract from it. Michele Hauf's "Racing the Moon" is a fine example of a premise that is directly tied to the sexuality of the story. Her hero, Dean, needs to satiate his lust to keep his wolf at bay. Her heroine, Sunday, must avoid having sex or there will be deadly consequences. . .even though she desires the hero. Wow. Perfect Bites premise!

Anna: Ann Leslie really liked the setting of my Bite, she thought it was fascinating and she hadn't seen it used much before (my Bite, "Savage Dragon" is set in Hungary, which also gives the history to my dragons). So think about where you are setting your Bite and let your mind run free – the world is a big place. So far, Bites have ranged from the North Sea in Nancy Holder's "Son of the Sea," to Texas in Lisa Renee Jones', "Return of the Beast," to the Vivi Anna-created city of Necropolis in her Bite, "Mahina's Storm."

Odd and Ends

Anna: Editorial for Bites is tight. That means no spelling errors, no grammar errors, no mistakes. You need to read it a hundred times, get your friends and CPs to read it, then read it a hundred times again. Try changing the format because your eyes stop seeing things when you stare at the same format – change your spacing to single spacing, print it out, or like me, send it to your Kindle.

Anna: Pacing is really important. This is a short story and you have a lot to fit in - every word counts. With the shorter Bite page count, your hero and heroine need to meet right up front and your story needs to get going straight away. But remember, this is a character-driven story, we need to see the emotional conflicts and how your characters change and grow.

Barbara: I think it's also important to remember the fun or maybe I should say heat. "Wilderness" started with a guy in chains. . .literally. I watched the movie Pitch Black and I just couldn't get that image of Vin Diesel in chains out of my head. That started the "what ifs" that eventually turned into my Bite. I came up with my tag line (Heat with heart. . .you *can* have it all!) after talking to Ann Leslie because it was only after talking with her that I realized *heat and heart* was the strength of "Wilderness" and, hopefully, the strength of my writing in general. Some of our previous tips seemed to focus on heart, but I wanted to make sure you don't forget the heat!

Anna: I love heat and I love Vin Diesel in chains! That would keep me happy for a very long time. Ah, what were we talking about here? Oh, yeah, one more tip – write the back cover blurb for your story. I had to do this for the Nocturne Bites Pitch Challenge and doing it can help you turn up the heat on all the elements. Does your blurb capture your (and an editor's or reader's) attention? Does it have strong emotional conflicts, interesting world-building, heat and sensuality? If it doesn't, then maybe you need to look at your story again and see if you can build on all those elements even more.

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