

Spotlight on Harlequin Executive Editor Paula Eykelhof

Dianna Love Snell interviewed asked Paula Eykelhof specifically about Harlequin's line, Epic, that launched September 2006. For submission guidelines go to <http://www.eharlequin.com/cms/learntowrite/ltwArticle.jhtml?pageID=050606wu01001>

Dianna: What are the unique qualities of Epic?

Paula: Epic—and please keep in mind that this is a working name—will encompass a greater scope, a longer time period, than a typical romance novel, which focuses on the development and initial resolution of the relationship. With an Epic Romance, we're open to a greater range of narrative and structural options. As well, although these are contemporary romances, a significant part of the story can take place in the past; this, of course, only makes sense, since each story describes *the history of a relationship*. The past could be conveyed in linear form, as flashbacks or memories, via letters or journals—to mention only the most obvious possibilities. Note, too, that we'll want to see how the romantic relationship has affected each of the characters and the people around them. Finally, I want to emphasize that we're in the process of developing this series and will be looking to our authors to help further define—and refine--it.

Dianna: If the romance will span more than one book, as in an ongoing series, what are you looking for at the end of each book?

Paula: Since we're publishing only two books per month at this point, we're looking primarily for single stories. But we're open to other possibilities, too. If the relationship does span more than one book, each book would still need a sense of *completion* (just as we would expect in the stories comprising a trilogy, for instance, in any of our other series)—even if certain key questions remain unanswered until the next story.

Dianna: How many books will normally encompass one couple's journey? Are "spin-off" romances from the secondary characters anticipated?

Paula: In most cases, it's probably one book, but, as I said, we're pretty open right now. And "spin-off" romances are definitely a possibility.

Dianna: Besides a well-written story and unique voice, what would you like to see submitted?

Paula: I'd like to see stories with compelling and believable characters who are changed, over time, by the relationship they create. That's crucial. Also—fresh and innovative plots that stem directly from these characters' experiences. Very good writing, which goes without saying. Dramatic, realistic, memorable stories that sweep the reader into the characters' world...

Dianna: What would you not like to see? For example, will paranormal or time travel be considered?

Paula: Paranormal elements shouldn't dominate. Credibility is important, but I wouldn't rule anything out. (After all, *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger is in many ways a perfect epic! Although somewhat longer, of course than the books we're looking for.)

Dianna: Can you give us a few more suggestions for stories to read?

Paula: THE NOTEBOOK and THE WEDDING by Nicholas Sparks
SAM'S LETTERS TO JENNIFER by James Patterson
COAST ROAD by Barbara Delinsky
ANGEL FALLS by Kristin Hannah
SHELTERING RAIN by JoJo Moyes (an English writer)
THE LAST VALENTINE by James Michael Pratt
THE LAST TIME THEY MET by Anita Shreve (except for the ending!)
NO CRYSTAL STAIR by Eva Rutland
BETWEEN FRIENDS (although this is the history of a friendship, not a romance)
Debbie Macomber
...and others, of course. Not all of these are a perfect "fit" (length in some cases) but I think you'll see the ways in which they're "epic" romances.

Dianna: Will you be accepting submissions from both published and unpublished authors?

Paula: YES! We're eager to see work from both published and unpublished authors. For unpublished writers, a new program like this can be a wonderful opportunity,

Dianna: Who is your target audience, and is there anything you'd like to tell us about this line that was not asked?

Paula: Our target audience is pretty broad, ranging from older teenage girls and young women (who seem to like the hopefulness such stories offer) to much older women (who've usually experienced a long-term and/or life-defining romance and will like the sense of affirmation the books provide). Women (and perhaps even men!) of all ages, really.

Another thing I'd like to point out:

Epic, in our case doesn't mean *long*. (70-80,000 words.) The "epic" qualities are more a matter of scope. (The obvious example here is a story like *The Notebook*, which describes the whole lifetime of a romance in about 250 pages.)

Dianna: Please tell us something about yourself and why you chose to be in publishing?

Paula: During my school and working life (not to mention my private life), I have always been drawn to stories and to language. I've worked on non-fiction projects but I definitely prefer fiction, especially stories like the ones we publish, which reflect the lives that women (and, yes, men) are living today.

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