

Marketing, Money & Motivation

by MV Ellis

With a twenty-year career spanning advertising, marketing, social media, and life coaching, MV brings a unique skillset to the business of being an author.

How I've learned to be happy in my own pants

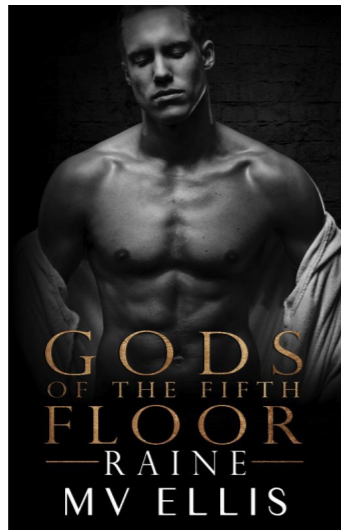
I'm not talking about loving the skin I'm in. I'm talking about embracing my writing process, which means being a panster to my very core. For a while I was in deep denial, but I've now accepted it as my true nature, and I'm "out" to my friends and family. I jest, but only slightly.

As writers there is an absolute plethora of information available to us suggesting how we should be conducting pretty much every aspect of our writing lives. So much so that it can be difficult to see the wood for the trees. It can be equally hard not to look around at what others are doing, and make less than favourable comparisons, whether it be about sales, style or process.

I wrote my first novel without consulting a single book, or online resource about writing craft. I had no plan, no structure, and no idea. I just typed until I was done. Having received six publishing offers for that first book, I can safely say that this method worked for me at the time. However, despite fudging it that time, as someone who now puts out several books a year, I am always interested in anything that

can make the path to publishing smoother. Therefore, as I've gained more experience, I've also done more research into the nuts and bolts of how a book comes together.

While there's still a part of me that suspects life would be easier if I were a plotter, my forays into that



writing process have confirmed that despite my desire, it's not my writing path. Having tried every known plotting system on the planet, and failed at them all, I've realised and my brain just can't take the "dress rehearsal" seriously, and only turns up for opening night (and the subsequent nights of the run).

That said, as time has gone on, I've made my pantsy nature work for me by employing a few key tricks. Firstly, I understand my process, and work with it, not against it.



This means "plotting," in so far as I am able – I always have an idea in my head of what the story will look like, including a loose premise, and a hint at some of the key events – largely driven by my characters.

It also entails knowing how long it takes me to write a book, and the stages I go through, including, but not limited to "Why the hell do I think I can write? This story has no legs." Having a good handle on my process allows me to plan for it, especially knowing that my first draft will be pretty free and easy, and building enough time to give it several passes before it goes to my editor. This was a lesson I learned the hard way.

Finally, I've learned to embrace the unknown, appreciate the beauty of this creative path and allow it to flourish. I now view the fact that the story forms as I write – and how it will come together is unclear until it's happening – as a challenge, not a hindrance. It's like solving a mystery of my own making, and I've always loved a good whodunit.

MV Ellis doesn't just write romance, she lives it. She followed her heart halfway around the world to be with a man she sat next to on a wild 36-hour bus journey across sultry Brazil.

Visit MVEllis.com to learn more. ♥

The Craft of Romance

by Elizabeth Rolls: books@elizabethrolls.com

Language poor and otherwise

"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." Inigo Montoya – The Princess Bride

Who doesn't love a Princess Bride quote?

I've been in the revisions cave. I'm blessed with an editor who can be counted on to query anything that jars her including historical snippets – "Elizabeth, could someone really have a mastectomy back then?" and language – "Do you think 'bailed up' might be too Australian for a Regency?"

She was right on 'bailed up' but you could indeed have a mastectomy in the early 1800s. Just ask Fanny Burney, or read her journal describing it. (Let me just say, Ouch!)

But language is sneaky. We think words have been around forever, and sometimes they have. But they didn't always mean what they mean now. Sometimes they didn't exist at all.

A couple of examples.

Nowadays if we describe someone as *sensible*, we mean that person is steady, calm, possessed of common sense. But we only have to know Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* to know that 200 years ago *sensible* meant what we now think of as *sensitivity*.

Sadistic bastard nearly made an unwarranted appearance in my current book set in 1805. I'd given

myself a little leeway on the use of *bastard* as a general insult; it doesn't take on that context until later in the century. But in revisions my eye tripped over *sadistic*. Okay, I know the derivation – pertaining to the Marquis de Sade (nuff said) and I had a rough idea of his dates (18th century), but when did his sexual preferences enter the dictionary, or at least get a guernsey in a clinical paper? Ooops. Early 20th century. So my *sadistic bastard* (a surgeon is digging around in the hero's side for a pistol ball) is now a *damn butcher*. Which all goes to show being picky about language in revisions doesn't have to mess up your story.

Note I said in *revisions*. Don't beat yourself up over things like that during the first draft. Just get the story down. That's partly what revisions are for – nit-pickery. It's also one of the things editors are for and I suspect this would have been picked up on the next round anyway, by the copyeditor if not my editor.

But how can we know this stuff? It's not enough to have a copy of the Shorter OED on your bookshelf or even the Historical Thesaurus of the OED. (Yeah, I do.) You need to have enough of a sense of words and language to know when something is off. Paradoxically this becomes less of a thing the further back your story is set. Very few of us could get away with a book set in the Middle Ages and written largely in Middle English. Hello, Laura Kinsale! Yes, *For My Lady's Heart* does exactly that. I'd argue it's the exception to prove the rule. The



point is not necessarily to sound as though we swallowed Shakespeare, or Jane Austen whole, but to give the flavour of the times by avoiding galloping anachronisms. Don't say your hero was mesmerised by the heroine in 1612, because *mesmerise* is derived from the methods of Dr Mesmer (1734-1815) picture above.

But how do you know to check? There really aren't any shortcuts for this. You just have to read. A lot. Join a critique group with other writers who read. A lot. Have beta readers. Keep reading. A lot. Trust your spidey senses. If something sounds off, check it. If it sounds too modern, check it. But do this in revisions. Don't give yourself a headache and writers' block worrying about it during the first draft.

Note to self: Do *not* use "spidey senses" in a Regency!

Elizabeth Rolls is a two-time winner of the HOLT Medallion, and RuBy and RITA finalist. ♥